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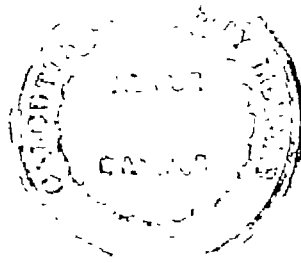
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The Indian Economic and Social History Review

Volume XXXV

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January–March 1998

Special Issue: Demographic History of India

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The Indian Economic and Social History Review

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South Asian demographic archaeology and Harappan population estimates: A brief reassessment

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Introduction

The population history of ancient South Asia, theoretically speaking, has a number of dimensions to it. These range from a description and analysis of the demographic characteristics of population groups in various chronological and geographical contexts, to understanding the ways in which these characteristics are related to cultural and environmental factors. In fact, however, discussions relating to the population of ancient India have substantially remained at the level of impressionistic generalisations with very little empirical support. This may in part be related to the nature of the source material which does not lend itself easily to the exercise of generating estimates. Literary sources which, regrettably, still provide the main scaffolding to the image of ancient India are inadequate for the purpose of reconstructing demographic history, while archaeological data useful for estimating population have rarely been collected with a view to advancing knowledge relating to this issue. However, since most sources of population history (even for the modern period) have built-in sources of error, the necessity of generating basic data on population in different regions and cultural settings in early India need not be shelved till the time that absolutely reliable evidence becomes available.

This article proposes to review the methods that have been used for estimating the population sizes of cities and other settlements of the

Acknowledgements: This paper owes a great deal to Mr Kuldip Singh's insistence on calculating population estimates on the basis of the available spatial and architectural features of Harappan settlements and Ms Shobha Menon's assistance in computing several figures.

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Harappan civilisation (c. 2700–1700 BC). It begins, however, by briefly discussing how the study of human population in archaeological contexts has been practised in India. Apart from highlighting some relevant archaeological dimensions of South Asian skeletal populations, this should also serve the purpose of demonstrating that the primary method for assessing the demographic parameters of Harappan cities is substantially the same as what has been more generally used in archaeological studies of other early Indian settlements. In this, ethnographic analogies, derived from data on medieval and modern towns and villages, are used to work out appropriate estimates for archaeological sites. It is my argument, in the second section, that this approach has on the one hand, ignored the variability of the historical and ethnographic sources and, on the other hand, has paid inadequate attention to the peculiar characteristics of the archaeological record itself. Finally, the article will tentatively suggest an alternative approach for converting archaeological data on settlement space into population figures.

Trends in South Asian Demographic Archaeology

Generally, archaeological studies on ancient population groups in early India have depended on the palaeodemographic approach which primarily studies 'populations' of skeletal remains. Such studies have been focused around a well-defined range of sites which have yielded dental, cranial and other skeletal elements. A 1984 catalogue mentioned 63 sites from where the relevant skeletal evidence had been published and 108 others with unpublished remains,¹ and these numbers have been steadily increasing in recent years. One need not go into the details of the sites or the data which come from almost all post-palaeolithic contexts, ranging from the mesolithic and going well into the historical period. A 1994 review of dental anthropology, for instance, lists over 25 settlements which have provided usable data on the relationship between diet and dental pathology and include mesolithic sites in Sri Lanka (Batadomba Lena, Beli Lena) and India (Sarai Nahar Rai, Bhimbetka, Bagor, Mahadaha), neolithic villages in Kashmir and peninsular India (Burzahom, Ireej, Balijapalle), iron-using sites in Pakistan (Timargarha, Sarai Khola) and megalithic contexts in Vidarbha and Andhra Pradesh (Mahurjhari, Raipur, Borgaon, Khairwada, Kanyathirthum).²

At the same time, issues that are considered to be central to demographic history such as mortality, fertility, nutrition and disease, and which can be

¹ K A R. Kennedy and P. Caldwell, 'South Asian Prehistoric Human Skeletal Remains and Burial Practices', in J R. Lukacs (ed.), *The People of South Asia: The Biological Anthropology of India, Pakistan and Nepal*, New York, 1984, pp. 29–57.

² S R. Walimbe and S.S. Kulkarni, 'Dental Anthropology in India: A Review', *Man and Environment*, Vol. 19, Nos 1–2, 1994, 205–16

profitably studied through skeletal evidence, have remained underworked. This has been so because of an unfortunate preoccupation among both physical anthropologists and archaeologists with racial paleontology, i.e., assigning skeletal populations to racial taxonomies. It is possible to cite a large number of earlier studies including those of B.S. Guha and Sasanka Sekhar Sarkar,¹ but what is more serious is that this remains a current concern in Indian archaeology. Pratap Dutta's work² in which a biometrical treatment of 260 skeletons from Harappa was attempted for the purpose of 'evaluating numerically the morphological affinity, or otherwise, between it and various other relevant contemporary population groups'³ so as to argue that they were physically 'Indian', 'occupying an anthropologically distinctive status'⁴ is an example of such an approach. Another recent publication in the same vein is that of B. Hemphill and J.R. Lukacs⁵ where 196 skeletons from the recent American excavations at the Harappan cemetery of R37 are discussed. Here, among other things, genetic shifts are said to accompany the introduction of Dravidian languages in South Asia! Notwithstanding the enormous literature that has demonstrated the problems as also the implications of correlating race with, or constructing ethnicity from, archaeological data, the tendency to correlate biology with the origin and development of historical processes, ranging from technology to language, remains very much alive.

There have been detailed critiques of racial history including a trenchant assessment of the interplay of race, language and culture in Indological studies in a recent monograph entitled *Colonial Indology*.⁶ As has been pointed out in that monograph, even in biological anthropology, not all scholars have found racial conclusions regarding ancient Indian skeletal material convincing. D.K. Sen, for instance, in his presidential address to the Anthropology and Archaeology sections of the Indian Science Congress in 1964-65 argued that such works used ideal racial types, conveniently ignoring the variabilities in measurements and characteristics:⁷

... almost all anthropologists working on the Indian material have been having these 'archetypes' before their mind, with the result that

¹ For a recent review of these and other studies of skeletal evidence within racial parameters, see D.K. Chakrabarti, *Colonial Indology: Sociopolitics of the Ancient Indian Past*, New Delhi, 1997, pp. 133-46.

² P.C. Dutta, *The Bronze Age Harappans: A Bio-Anthropological Study of the Skeletons Discovered at Harappa*, Calcutta, 1983.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁵ B. Hemphill and J.R. Lukacs, 'Hegelian logic and the Harappan civilization', in A.J. Gail and G.J.R. Mevissen (eds), *South Asian Archaeology 1991*, Berlin, 1993, pp. 101-20.

⁶ Chakrabarti, *Colonial Indology*; also see T.R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India*, New Delhi, 1997.

⁷ Cited in *ibid.*, pp. 145-46.

each skull has been taken singly and compared with one of the hypothetical racial types. If the comparison shows a closeness to a type, the skull has been regarded as belonging to that particular race. If on the other hand, the resemblance is less exact, the skull has been relegated to a mixed group. It may very often happen that a single skull shows features that belong to two or more hypothetical types; in such cases, the skull has been immediately considered to have been the result of a mixture of these races. Sometimes, the most likely 'racial types' have been considered in the skulls from a particular area, so that the conclusions generally could confirm a conventional story of invasion or migration put forward in history. Since the individual variability in physical characteristics is very great, it has not been difficult to find the type suitable in a particular situation from a collection of skeletal material.

Similarly, the writings of K.A.R. Kennedy, a palaeoanthropologist, have consistently highlighted the fallacy of seeking pure races in the ancient South Asian past since skeletal remains of earlier populations show a degree of biological heterogeneity which appears to be as broad as that discernible today.¹⁰ If South Asian palaeodemography no longer appears as a mere inventory of racial traits, it is partly due to the work of this scholar who pioneered the science of 'osteobiography' (i.e., extracting information of life histories from bones)¹¹ in South Asian archaeology. Among other things, his publications have demonstrated that changes in skeletal morphology could be more meaningfully understood non-genetically, as resulting from the differential functional demand placed on the body in the changed lifestyles of specialised hunting-gathering and early farming societies. For instance, several skeletons from Sarai Nahar Rai, a hunter-gatherer settlement in the Ganga valley, were shown to have hyperdevelopment in the attachments of particular arm muscles (aconious and supinator muscles at the proximal ends of ulnae) because of habitual stress related to activities such as spear throwing, use of the slingshot, etc.¹²

A major, current interest in the Department of Archaeology at the Deccan College, Pune has also been the reconstruction of the composition, diet and longevity of population groups in the Deccan, especially those from chalcolithic and megalithic sites. The descriptive catalogue of skeletal

¹⁰ K.A.R. Kennedy, 'Biological Anthropology of Prehistoric Populations in South Asia: A survey of Current Research', in K.A.R. Kennedy (ed.), *Ecological Backgrounds of South Asian Prehistory*, Ithaca, 1976, pp. 166-78; also see K.A.R. Kennedy and P. Caldwell, 'Skeletal Remains'.

¹¹ Whether it is hunter-gatherer cultures or situations marked by agricultural intensification like the Harappan one, subsistence strategies are known to create a biological impact. This can be assessed from human bones which always contain the chemical traces or what are called 'signatures' of different foods that were consumed.

¹² Kennedy and Caldwell, 'Skeletal Remains', p. 38.

material from chalcolithic Inamgaon, which contains data from 243 burials that were excavated by the Deccan College team, is among the most detailed publications on the physical anthropology of skeletons from a single archaeological site in India; in addition to the morphological characteristics of crania, bones and teeth, their pathological anomalies are also outlined.¹³ More recently S.R. Walimbe and Aletha Tavares have attempted to infer a few general trends from such data.¹⁴ Their figures regarding the age-wise and sex-wise distribution of Deccan chalcolithic groups suggest a 56.96 per cent infant mortality rate, an average life expectancy of around 25 years and a maximum lifespan of 35 years. Incidentally, in a contiguous area, the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra, the skeletal series from later iron-bearing megalithic contexts did not contain any individual above 32 years of age¹⁵ and was marked by a very high young adult (17 to 31 years) mortality rate—32.73 per cent of the available sample. Additionally, the dietary intake of many of these groups has been related to their pathological and osteological abnormalities. Apparently, the most prevalent lesion found in the pre-adult segment of the Deccan chalcolithic groups was superficial porotic hyperostosis.¹⁶ This is linked to inadequate vitamin C and is more common among groups consuming mainly cooked food as boiling destroys ascorbic acid. Hunter-gatherers, on the other hand, have much fewer stress markers on bones and teeth that are diagnostic of fluctuations of nutritional resources.¹⁷ At the same time, instances of dental attrition and interproximal grooves (a notch worn into the tooth cervix) are much higher.¹⁸ The latter feature is generally attributed to activities such as preparing sinew for bowstrings, hafting points or even habitual toothpicking.

The other area of demographic investigation in South Asian archaeology, also the theme of this article, involves an estimation of population size, density and growth rate in various phases and contexts. The number of people that occupied a settlement or a region can be archaeologically determined in a number of ways that are qualitatively different from those that are employed in such periods and instances where census data and compilations like that of Abul Fazl are available. The methods devised for

¹³ J.R. Lukacs and S.R. Walimbe, *Excavations at Inamgaon*, II, 1, Pune, 1986.

¹⁴ S.R. Walimbe and Aletha Tavares, 'Evolving Trends in Skeletal Biology in the Indian Subcontinent: A Case Study on the Incipient Agricultural Populations of the Deccan Plateau', in S. Wadia, R. Korasettar and V.S. Kale (eds), *Quaternary Environments and Geoarchaeology of India*, Geological Society of India, Memoir No. 32, Bangalore, 1995, pp. 525-29.

¹⁵ R.K. Mohanty and S.R. Walimbe, 'A Demographic Approach to the Vidarbha Megalithic Culture', *Man and Environment*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 1993, p. 99.

¹⁶ Walimbe and Alvares, 'Evolving Trends'.

¹⁷ Kennedy and Caldwell, 'Skeletal Remains', p. 38.

¹⁸ J.R. Lukacs and J.N. Pal, 'Dental Anthropology of Mesolithic Hunter-Gatherers: A Preliminary Report on the Mahadaha and Sarai Nahar Raj Dentition', *Man and Environment*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1992, pp. 45-55.

this purpose range from an analysis of settlement details and food refuse to burials and ethnohistorical data.¹⁹ As far as South Asian sites are concerned, generally, available estimates have computed population size from archaeological settlement data understood in the light of relevant ethnohistorical evidence. This approach is based on the presumption that there is a relationship between settlement space and population. Several aspects of a settlement can be used for estimating population—volume of site deposits, lifespan of the settlement, compacted volume of house materials and covered area of residential units. In Indian archaeology, however, population has been generally estimated by focusing on the size of the habitational mound or archaeological settlement in relation to a fixed number of persons and/or houses per site hectare. This number, incidentally, is determined from a village or town that is considered as being comparable to the archaeological settlement under consideration.

Makkhan Lal's assessment of the protohistoric and early historic population in the Kanpur district, for instance, was done in this way.²⁰ Using data on Uttar Pradesh villages, he computed a per hectare density for the archaeological sites of Kanpur. Since the average size of the household in Uttar Pradesh for 50 years (1911–1961) was 4.9 persons per house while the total number of houses in a modest village was 55 per hectare, he arrived at an estimate of 271 persons per hectare for the sites in that area in the 2nd and 1st millennia BC.

Based on these calculations, Lal argued that the total population of Kanpur district was 4,646 persons in the Black and Red Ware period of occupation (roughly second-half of the second millennium BC) which increased to 14,509 in the Painted Grey Ware phase (roughly 900 BC onwards). During the subsequent North Black Polished Ware phase (c. 600 BC onwards), this increased to 37,909 persons to finally reach a figure of 79,077 persons in the early historic period (2nd century BC till 3rd century AD).²¹ Effectively, this means that there was a fivefold increase in the population of the Kanpur area in a period of about a thousand years (from the beginning till the end of this first millennium BC.)²² Theoretically, this should be possible keeping in mind the rate of demographic growth in

¹⁹ For a comprehensive and critical evaluation of theoretical models and techniques used in demographic archaeology, see F.A. Hassan, *Demographic Archaeology*, New York, 1981.

²⁰ M. Lal, *Settlement History and Rise of Civilization in Ganga-Yamuna Doab*, Delhi, 1984, pp. 211–37. Here, an attempt has been made to provide figures for the population size of every known settlement in Kanpur.

²¹ The figures suggested by Lal, as he himself admits, may seem to be too precise. This is because, instead of rounding off the figures, he has stated the figures as were obtained from calculations. See *ibid.*, p. 212–14.

²² According to Lal, the average annual growth rate from 1350 BC to 250 BC comes to 0.21 per cent and from 250 BC to AD 150 it comes to 0.17 per cent; *ibid.*, p. 230

some areas in the more recent centuries.²³ Moreover, during the first millennium BC there was a marked expansion in the arable land and in the number of settlements as also a major phase of urban growth that coincided with the establishment of several kingdoms/states in the *doab* and Gangetic plains, among other areas. In another study, that of the Allahabad district, which was the heartland of the kingdom of Vatsa, a broadly similar demographic phenomenon has been observed.²⁴ Here, in period I (1000–600 BC), the population was apparently 7,160, increasing to 20,100 in period II (600–350 BC) and 62,502 in period III (350–100 BC). One may, however, point out that this study (like that of Lal) was based on a surface survey of sites, many of which were multicultural. In field explorations of multicultural sites, while it is possible to calculate the size of the mound or site with a degree of precision, estimates of the increase and decrease in settlement size, phase-wise and period-wise, are unlikely to be very accurate. Consequently, one needs to treat such population figures with caution. Just as demographers, while using census figures, modify the stated estimates depending upon whether the census was roughly or well organised, in archaeological estimates as well, it is imperative to arrive at a methodology by which population figures are calibrated, depending on the nature of the survey and the character of the sites.

Population estimates for chalcolithic sites in the Deccan are also available. These have suggested a more modest working estimate than that of Lal for Kanpur, of around 200 persons per hectare.²⁵ However, unlike Lal's study which was based on an analogy from the same geographical area, in this instance, the authors depended on the figures worked out by Robert McC. Adams²⁶ for Mesopotamia from modern data on the old quarters of Baghdad (216 persons per hectare) and other Middle-Eastern towns and villages in the Susiana plain and Kur basin. This Middle-Eastern index is also the one that has been accepted in *The Archaeology of Early Historic South Asia* for estimating the populations of such widely dispersed settlements as Hastinapura in the Ganga–Yamuna *doab* to Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka.²⁷ What

²³ For instance, in Bengal, the population over a period of just about seventy years, from 1790–92 to 1860–62 increased from 3,31,49,000 to 6,56,05,000. For detailed figures, see S Guha, 'The Population History of South Asia from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Centuries: An Exploration', Paper Presented at the Conference on Asian Population History, Taipei, 4–8 January 1996.

²⁴ G. Erdosy, *Urbanization in Early Historic India*, Oxford, 1988.

²⁵ M.K. Dhavalikar, H.D. Sankalia and Z.D. Ansari, *Excavations at Inamgaon I* (ii), Pune, 1988, p. 1001. For the method used, see M.K. Dhavalikar and G.L. Possehl, 'Subsistence Pattern of an Early Farming Community of Western India', *Puratattva*, 7, 1974, p. 40.

²⁶ R.M. Adams, *Land Behind Baghdad*, Chicago, 1965.

²⁷ R.A.E. Coningham, 'Dark Age or Continuum? An Archaeological Analysis of the Second Emergence of Urbanism in South Asia', in F.R. Allchin, *The Archaeology of Early Historic South Asia*, Cambridge, 1995, p. 58.

these writings seem to have ignored are the more recent studies of the Near-East²⁸ which have demonstrated that the average population density of rural settlements in Southwest Asia was well below 200 persons per hectare and was likely to have been 119.6 [p(or)s] 54 per hectare depending upon the degree of nucleation within the settlements. Moreover, practically speaking, it may have been more useful to search for suitable analogies from ethnographic contexts within the subcontinent. The substantial literature on premodern towns and cities in India, some of which will be discussed in the next section, shows a wide variation in the population density of urban centres from area to area and within one region as well. At the very least, this variation emphasizes the futility of using a fixed general figure for estimating population from archaeological remains in South Asia.

Reassessing previous estimates of Harappan settlements

The Harappan urban phenomenon was the result of a sequence of interrelated social and economic processes going back to 4000 BC or even earlier. These need not be explored in the present context.²⁹ What does appear to be striking and relevant, however, is that this phase coincided with a major demographic event—the emergence of large urban centres—as also a rapid expansion of agricultural, semi-nomadic and craft settlements in various parts of Sind, Bahawalpur, Punjab, Haryana and Gujarat. While earlier, Mohenjo-daro and Harappa stood out as the only large cities (with estimated populations of between 33,000 to 41,000 each), today we know of eight more settlements of similar dimensions. These are fairly spread out—in Bhatinda district of Punjab, Hissar area of Haryana, the Cholistan tract of Bahawalpur and Kutch in Gujarat—and symbolise the creation of aggregates of population on a scale that was unknown in the antecedent phase. Clearly, the inhabitants of such cities and several smaller ones were supported by a broad-based and stable agriculture.³⁰ We know of several cultivated crops, although those in and around the Indus system (wheat, barley, chickpeas, flax, lentils, and perhaps mustard) were different

²⁸ These have been discussed in Hassan, *Demographic Archaeology*.

²⁹ For the background and origin of the Indus Civilisation, see D.K. Chakrabarti, *The Archaeology of Ancient Indian Cities*, Delhi, 1995, pp. 11–52.

³⁰ In addition to agriculture, animal husbandry was an integral component of the Harappan economy with cattle bones accounting for more than 70 per cent of the total bone collection. Wild animals—buffalo, cattle, rhinoceros, elephant, several species of antelopes among others—were also exploited for food. Generally, the ratio of wild animals in relation to the domesticates is 1:4. Additionally, the remains of a variety of birds, turtles, fish, crabs and molluscs have been found at several settlements.

from the crops that were grown in the Gujarat area (rice, millet and legumes).³¹

In fact, it has been argued that the agricultural potential of the Indus flood plain was first harnessed in this phase³² and possibly explains why the settlement area more than doubled. According to M.R. Mughal's calculations, the 19 sites whose sizes are known covered 68.94 hectares in the pre-Harappan phase as compared to 172.07 hectares (number of sites is 22; Mughal takes 83 hectares as the area of Mohenjo-daro) in the Harappan period.³³ The settlement expansion was much more striking in the Cholistan tract of Bahawalpur, a core area of the civilisation.³⁴ The site estimates of 73 of the 174 settlements show a covered area of 447.68 hectares as compared to 40 early Harappan sites, 32 of which covered 210.01 hectares. In this area, it may also be broadly accurate to speak of a general de-ruralisation of the countryside since 79 (or 45.48 per cent) of the settlements have been classified as being of an industrial/craft character while 33 sites (18.96 per cent) combined residential and craft activities.³⁵ Settlement expansion is evident in other parts of the distribution zone of the Harappan civilisation and clearly, this progressive, sometimes even exponential, increase was a function of increasing population size.

What this increase means in terms of numbers has not been worked out in any depth but is necessary for an accurate characterisation of the demographic conditions in the Harappan phase. What has, however, been discussed is the issue of determining the population sizes of specific Harappan settlements, and it is to these estimates that we may now turn.

The first study of Harappan population was made by a statistician, Jatindra Mohan Datta in 1962,³⁶ who depended on the granary sizes at

³¹ One may point out, however, that new crop types are appearing in some of the recent excavations and may require a modification of current thinking on Harappan agriculture. For instance, at the city of Harappa, a report by a joint team of palaeobotanists and archaeologists from Japan and Pakistan, maintained that while there was clear evidence of rice and finger millet from the late Harappan phase, the presence of these crops during the mature Harappan period could not be ruled out since five samples of pottery and baked bricks of that period were thought to contain *Ragi* and *Oryza* samples. See H. Fujiwara, M.R. Mughal, A. Sasaki and T. Matano, 'Rice and Ragi at Harappa: Preliminary Results by Plant Opal analysis', *Pakistan Archaeology*, 27, 1992, pp. 129-42.

³² Chakrabarti, *Ancient Indian Cities*, 1995, pp. 49-50.

³³ M.R. Mughal, 'Further Evidence of the Early Harappan Culture in the Greater Indus Valley', *South Asian Studies*, 6, 1990, p. 192.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Datta, in the same year, also published his analysis of the population of India around 320 BC. Here, Datta based his estimate on the size of Chandragupta Maurya's army, mentioned in literary sources and the number of families who would have been required to support it as also the salaries of army personnel, the number of horses that would be required, the working life of a horse, fodder requirements, etc. This, in his opinion, worked out to about 143 million people in the empire of Chandragupta. However, since this did not cover many parts of the

Harappa (covered area: 12,000 sq.ft or 1,114.8 sq.m. with a height of 35 ft or 10.6 m.) and Mohenjo-daro (covered area: 11,260 sq.ft or 1,046 sq.m. with a height of 25 ft or 7.6 m.).³⁷ Datta's assumption was that the grain stored in these units would be sufficient for a year's consumption needs of its citizens which, taking an annual rate of dietary intake per head, could then be converted into reliable population figures. So, calculating the total volume of milled grain (2,50,000 cu.ft or 7,079.2 cu.m. for Harappa and 2,25,200 cu.ft or 6,377 cu.m. for Mohenjo-daro) and its weight (0.7 maunds per cu.ft for wheat) in these granaries, which was divided by the annual rate of dietary intake per person, Datta arrived at a total population figure of 37,155 for Harappa and 33,469 for Mohenjo-daro. According to Datta, since Harappa covered an area of 480 acres (194.2 hectares) while Mohenjo-daro was spread over 640 acres (259 hectares), a density of 74 persons per acre for the former and 52 persons per acre for the latter was likely.

Datta's estimate of Mohenjo-daro's spatial dimensions even in 1962 was incorrect; John Marshall had suggested an area of roughly 240–250 acres (97–101 hectares) and more recently, Michael Jansen has put the visible urban space of the city at 247 acres (100 hectares).³⁸ Consequently, Datta's figure for that city would have to be revised to 133 persons per acre. More significantly, one of the assumptions on which this approach is based, that is, of a central storage facility for the civic consumption of the city's populace seems to be erroneous. There is no evidence for a centralised body exercising control over the agricultural produce and its supply. It is entirely possible that the stocks in the granaries were not meant for citizens alone but were transported to other settlements. The location of the granary at Harappa, on the riverside, also suggests this. But, the major reason why this approach has had such a limited applicability relates perhaps to the paucity of similar grain storage facilities even in provincial centres like Kalibangan in Rajasthan, Banawali in Haryana or Dholavira in Gujarat. Clearly, even if it was possible to arrive at a more precise

Indian subcontinent, the total population of India would have been much higher, in the vicinity of 181 million. This, if correct, would mean a larger population than even at the time of Akbar when, apparently, the figure for the subcontinent was about 144 million! See J.M. Datta, 'Population of India about 320 bc', *Man in India*, Vol. 42, No. 4, 1962, pp. 277–92.

³⁷ J.M. Datta, 'Demographic Notes on Harappan Skeletons', in *Human Skeletal Remains from Harappa*, Calcutta, 1962, pp. 6–12. The sizes of the granaries that are mentioned above have been taken from Datta's paper.

³⁸ M. Jansen, 'Water Supply and Sewage Disposal at Mohenjo-daro', *World Archaeology*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 1989, p. 177. Jansen maintains that while the present site covers an area of at least 100 hectares, there are structural remains extending at least one mile further east beyond the present site. Additionally, he mentions that the excavation programme in 1931 unearthed a densely built up urban area over more than 1,00,000 sq. m., amounting to 'one tenth of the total suspected area of Mohenjo-daro' This would also give us an area of 100 hectares or 247 acres.

correlation for calculating the city population from granary sizes, computations could only be made for very few settlements.

The second approach, outlined by H.T. Lambrick in 1964, is an overwhelmingly ethnohistorical one and has been more influential. In this, the populations of the third millennium bc cities (Mohenjo-daro and Harappa) were computed by using nineteenth century data on the trading city of Shikarpur in Sind. Lambrick³⁹ considered Mohenjo-daro as being very similar to the Shikarpur that was described by T. Postans:

Postans tells us that its walls made a circuit of nearly three miles; that the large covered bazar was half a mile long; and that it contained 22,000 inhabitants according to an 'accurate census' taken by himself in 1840-41. He proceeds to describe the characteristics of the interior of a Sindhi city; we may note particularly that the dwellings are 'upper roomed', the apartments ill-ventilated, the passages between the houses narrow, scarcely admitting a laden camel.⁴⁰

The figure mentioned by Postans as the population of Shikarpur—22,000 inhabitants—according to Lambrick, required an upward revision, since the former's enumeration possibly did not touch the 'harem' area, to 30,000 inhabitants. It was also pointed out that Harappa and Mohenjo-daro had similar circuits and that the latter was known to have houses of two storeys which were densely distributed within the city area. However, for some reason which remained unstated, he felt that more people lived within the three-mile circumference of Mohenjo-daro than at Shikarpur, and allotted to the former, as also Harappa, a population of 35,000 each. Based on these figures, the density at these Harappan cities would have been approximately 76 persons per acre calculated in the following way:

$$\begin{array}{rcl} \text{City population} & & 35,000 \\ \hline & \text{or} & \\ \text{Covered area} & & 458.18^{41} \end{array} = \text{roughly 76 persons per acre}$$

On the face of it, a density of 76 persons per acre or roughly 188 persons per hectare seems reasonable enough. But, what was overlooked by Lambrick and other scholars who have subsequently used this index was that Shikarpur as described by Postans, with its narrow, confined and dirty streets, with no building of importance except one mosque, qualitatively differed from the architectural sophistication of the deliberately planned

³⁹ H.T. Lambrick, *Sind. A General Introduction*, Hyderabad, 1964, p. 71.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*

⁴¹ This would roughly be the acreage of a settlement with a three-mile circumference.

city of Mohenjo-daro.⁴² Among the more important differences was the fact that, unlike the citizens of the third millennium BC, a large portion of the population calculated as belonging to Shikarpur resided outside the city walls.⁴³ Postans also seems to have given conflicting estimates for the population and circumference of Shikarpur. For instance, in 1841, he mentioned the following figures from the census that he had conducted: Hindus =/ 18,913, Muslims =/ 8,647, and 1,000 Afghans and Pathans.⁴⁴ From these, it would seem that Shikarpur's population was 28,560 persons which is substantially larger than the 22,000 inhabitants mentioned elsewhere, on which Lambrick apparently based his calculations. Similarly, at one place Postans mentioned the circumference of the city walls to be 3,831 yards⁴⁵ (this would mean a length of 2.17 miles) while Lambrick worked with a figure of nearly three miles, again given by Postans. Since the spatial extent and the population of nineteenth century Shikarpur are in dispute, it can hardly be regarded as an appropriate example for estimating the populations of Harappan cities.

Unfortunately, the empirical data on which Lambrick depended, were never carefully scrutinised and came to be used for calculating the density of all types of Harappan settlements. This can be seen in Chakrabarti's study on the population sizes of Harappan sites.⁴⁶ The merit of that study was that, for the first time, estimates for as many as 35 Harappan settlements of all kinds, ranging from a couple of acres to over 100 acres, located in all parts of the distribution zone of the civilisation were offered, but this was done on the basis of Lambrick's correlation between site area and population. What makes Chakrabarti's figures inaccurate is that he was under the impression that Lambrick's estimate of 35,000 as the population of Mohenjo-daro was based on a figure of 8,50,000 sq.m. or about 210 acres as the city area whereas the latter had clearly mentioned that the second-third millennium BC cities, like Shikarpur, had a three-mile circumference. This circumference would enclose roughly 458 acres or 185 hectares.

⁴² Among other things, the western segment of the city formed part of a clearly demarcated citadel area. This was constructed on a gigantic artificial platform measuring approximately 400 m. by 200 m. and attaining a final height of 7 m. after being enlarged twice. Using this platform as a foundation, further platforms were built on top in order to elevate structures of special significance such as the granary and Great Bath. So, the highest raised buildings must have stood more than 20 m. above the surrounding plain. For details on the structural character of the city, see J. Marshall (ed.), *Mohenjodaro and the Indus Civilization*, 3 vols, London, 1931. Also see Jansen, 'Water Supply'. A reading of Marshall and Jansen reveals that the third millennium BC city does not remotely match up to the description given by Postans of nineteenth century Shikarpur.

⁴³ T. Postans, 'Memorandum on the City of Shikarpoor in Upper Sindh', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1841, p. 18.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ D.K. Chakrabarti, 'Size of Harappan Settlements', in D.P. Agrawal and D.K. Chakrabarti (eds), *Essays in Indian Protohistory*, Delhi, 1979, pp. 205-15.

So, whereas Lambrick worked with a figure of 76 persons per acre, Chakrabarti's estimate was more than double, at over 160 persons per acre.²⁷ If modifications are made, according to Lambrick's figures, Chakrabarti's estimate of 15 Harappan settlements with a population of more than 5,000 must be scaled down. In any case, since Lambrick chose an ethnographic example which was qualitatively dissimilar to Mohenjo-daro, it is necessary to discard his figures and all estimates that have depended on the correlation worked out by him.

In estimating population by analogy, even when more satisfactory data are employed than what was cited by Lambrick, one should use a fixed estimator such as 200 persons or 120 persons per site hectare as a blanket index with caution for two reasons. First, the area of the site or mound, i.e., the accumulated remains of ancient nucleated settlements, can significantly differ from the inhabited segment within it. An example in point is Harappan Surkotada in Kutch where the length (160 m.) and width (125 m.) of the mound suggests an area of 20,000 sq. m.²⁸ However, excavations there have revealed that the citadel and lower residential complex, both containing living units, measured only 60 × 60 m. and 60 × 55 m. respectively or an area of only 6,900 sq.m.²⁹ Obviously, an estimate of Surkotada's population on the basis of its mound size is likely to be unreliable. The same is true for the town of Kalibangan. Its overall perimeter, made up of three mounds (KLB-1, KLB-2, KLB-3), is said to be 1.5 to 2 kms.³⁰ A 1.5 km. circumference would mean a reasonably large area. However, if we look at the sizes of the habitational zones within this, they are appreciably less. KLB-3 was an exclusively ritual complex, possibly post-dating the mature Harappan phase. KLB-1, on which the citadel complex lay, measured 240 × 120 m. and KLB-2, the locale of the lower township, covered an area of 240 × 360 m.³¹ Without taking KLB-3 into account, this would mean an area of 1,15,200 sq. m. or roughly 28.4 acres. In other words, the inhabited area of Kalibangan was visibly smaller than the area covered by the mounds. The residential area would be even less—the southern rhomb of the citadel mound contained large mud-brick platforms with a series of fire altars, with residential houses only in the northern section. Similarly, Kuntasi, a small two-hectare Harappan port town on the boundary between Kutch and Saurashtra, was surrounded by a double fortification. A substantial uninhabited space, which varies from 1 m. to 1.5 m. in width

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

²⁸ J.P. Joshi, *Excavations at Surkotada and Explorations in Kutch*, New Delhi, 1990, p. 15.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

³⁰ B.B. Lal, 'Kalibangan and the Indus Civilization', in D.P. Agrawal and D.K. Chakrabarti (eds), *Essays*, p. 65.

³¹ B.B. Lal, 'Some Reflections on the Structural Remains at Kalibangan', in B.B. Lal and S.P. Gupta (eds), *Frontiers of the Indus Civilization*, Delhi, 1984, pp. 56-60.

separated the two fortification walls,³² and a population index that does not take this into consideration would be far too high. The same holds true for Dholavira in Kutch. The debris of the main fortified city there covers roughly 128.5 acres (800 m. EW and 650 m. NS).³³ However, the citadel measures around 11.8 acres (300 × 160 m.), the 'Middle town' 22.2 acres (360 × 250 m.) and the dimensions of the lower town work out to about 22 acres as well (300 × 300 m.). There are also large open spaces between the citadel area and the Middle town, and around them. For estimating the population size of Dholavira then, it would hardly be useful to offer an estimate on the basis of the spatial extent of the settlement debris of the main city.

Second, since most archaeological estimates have depended on analogies derived from documentary sources, the great deal of variability in documentary estimates needs to be considered as well.³⁴ One can compare, for instance, the seventeenth century estimates of Agra and Shahjahanabad, both of which were capital cities and in broadly the same geographical zone. As far as Agra is concerned, I have depended on Hameeda Khatoon Naqvi's work³⁵ who has taken *Tuzuk-i-Jahangir*'s description of the city area and the seventeenth century traveller F.S. Manrique's population estimate of it to be reliable. The habitable areas of the city were spread on both sides of the Yamuna river and, on the basis of Jahangir's description, seem to have covered 29 sq. miles on the western side and 4.16 sq. miles towards the east.³⁶ This would be about 21,222 acres which, if Manrique's estimate of about 7,00,000 citizens is reliable, would mean a density of 33 persons per acre. This was much lower than the population density of Shahjahanabad later in the century. Stephen Blake's study mentions that Shahjahanabad was surrounded by a 3.8 miles long stone wall and that within this walled area there were 2,50,000–3,00,000 persons.³⁷ His calculation, that the area inside the fortification was 1,500 acres, however, is incorrect since the circumference of such fortifications would work out to a rough figure of 735 acres. Taking 735 acres as the enclosed area of the city,

³² M.K. Dhavalikar, 'Kuntan. A Harappan Port in Western India'. In C. Jarrige (ed.), *South Asian Archaeology 1989, Wisconsin*, 1992, p. 78, Figure 10.4.

³³ R.S. Bisht, 'Dholavira: New Horizons of the Indus Civilization', *Puratattva*, 20, 1989–90, p. 72.

³⁴ The methods by which the population figures for medieval and nineteenth century cities have been arrived at is not tackled here. Possibly, scholars researching on the urban history of medieval and modern India are more competent to offer a review of the limitations of such methods. What is reasonably clear, however, is the great variation in the per acre population densities of various contemporary cities.

³⁵ H.K. Naqvi, *Urban Centres and Industries in Upper India 1556–1803*, Bombay, 1968, pp. 17–18.

³⁶ This has been calculated on the basis of the figures mentioned in Naqvi's work.

³⁷ S.P. Blake, *Shahjahanabad: The Sovereign City in Mughal India, 1639–1739*, Cambridge, 1991, pp. 31, 67.

the density per acre would have been 340 persons. This incidentally is much higher than what was encountered in Amritsar in the middle of the nineteenth century. Amritsar, like Shahjahanabad, had a large walled segment of 840 acres of land³⁸ in which the per acre density was 145.3 which went up to 183.6 by 1901 and only reached a figure of 351.4 in 1941. Similarly, if one looks at some of the details relating to the nineteenth century fortified Gujarat town of Kheda, the roughly 100 acres, enclosed in the 7,425 feet circumference of the settlement walls, contained a population of 12,000.³⁹ This gives a figure of about 120 persons per acre. Many more examples can be cited to support my argument, but the more general point, hopefully, has been made. Obviously, if one was to search for a workable modern index from the geographical zone that coincides with the distribution area of the Harappan civilisation so as to estimate the population of an ancient fortified settlement, there would be a wide spectrum to choose from. This variety is interesting and important but does not get conveniently collapsed into a reliable ethno-archaeological framework.

Finally, a detailed comment on the Harappan population estimates suggested by Walter A. Fairservis Jr. These estimates were offered in a paper entitled 'The Origin, Character and Decline of an Early Civilisation'⁴⁰ which has been widely cited although none of the writings that have used these estimates have reflected on its problems and pitfalls.

First, about the method. Here, it is necessary to distinguish between what Fairservis proposed to do and the actual basis of his estimates. He believed that the population of a Harappan settlement could be computed by (i) calculating the covered area of house plans visible in the excavated portions; (ii) using this as a ratio for estimating the numbers of houses in the rest of the site and, (iii) computing its population by a comparison with the number of people living in similar village houses in contemporary contexts.⁴¹ This is an approach that was pioneered in the context of Mesopotamia by H. Frankfort but has been applied in many other situations.⁴² In the case of the Indus civilisation, this is also a feasible approach because there are enough details relating to a range of settlements, their physical layouts and house types.

In fact, Fairservis' paper made no attempt to detail, site by site, the types of Harappan houses whose plans are known and the number of persons that could have inhabited them, on the basis of ethnographic analogies. On the contrary, Fairservis simply worked with an average figure of six people per house in the Harappan context which, in turn, was based on the figures published in

³⁸ A. Gauba, *Amritsar: A Study in Urban History, (1840-1947)*, Jalandhar, 1988, p. 142.

³⁹ H.G. Briggs, *The Cities of Gujarashtra*, Bombay, 1849, pp. 193-94.

⁴⁰ This was published in *Novitates*, 2302, 1967, and reprinted in G. Possehl (ed.), *Ancient Cities of the Indus*, New Delhi, 1979, pp. 66-89.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁴² See Hassan, *Demographic Archaeology*, p. 66.

1962 by the Government of Pakistan. The details of those figures, incidentally, were not cited by him. Second, while it has often been argued⁶⁵ that Fairervis suggested an area of 800 sq. ft per individual and, indeed this is mentioned in the text of the paper, a closer reading shows this to be a misprint.⁶⁶ He, in fact, used an estimate of 800 sq. ft as the average size of a house, inhabited by six persons at all sites with the exception of Kechi Beg and Mohenjo-daro. This would be evident from the figures in Table 1.

Anyone with a working knowledge of the excavation reports relating to Harappan settlements would be able to point out that the suggested average house area,⁶⁷ by no stretch of imagination, is as tidy as that. In the case of Mohenjo-daro, for instance, as will be discussed in the next section, during the Intermediate phase, an average of 111.3 sq. m. or 1,197.58 sq. ft per house/unit is the figure that the excavated house plans suggest.

There are two further problems in the computations summarised in Table 1. If one examines the area of each city in relation to the number of persons suggested by Fairervis, the per acre density for several settlements including Kot Diji, Amri, Mohenjo-daro, Harappa and Ghazi Shah seems to be in the vicinity of 327 persons per acre, and in the case of Kechi Beg, it is higher.⁶⁸ Considering that there were hardly any cities with such thick population concentrations even at the turn of the present century in India, Fairervis' calculations have to be viewed with a large dose of scepticism. Finally, and this is the reason why the estimates suggested are inordinately high, the population estimates were based on the total site area. In other words, the space within the perimeters of a site was treated by Fairervis as entirely residential without making any allowances for non-residential buildings, roads or open areas. Since the pitfalls of this approach have already been mentioned above, they need not be repeated here. It is enough to reiterate that a settlement is made up of different functional areas and structures, several of which are non-residential. Because of this,

⁶⁵ See Dhavalikar and Possehl, 'Subsistence Pattern', p. 40.

⁶⁶ In the text of the paper, Fairervis (p. 83) mentions a ratio of 800 sq. ft per person but an examination of Table 2 there as also footnote a would show that he is suggesting this figure for an average house.

⁶⁷ The covered area per unit in this chart has been worked out on the basis of the figures given by Fairervis and is not mentioned in his paper.

⁶⁸ A house in the Harappan context, has been defined in a number of ways. Jansen and Sarcina have argued that this may be done by mainly studying the position of the courtyard in relation to other rooms; Jansen, 'Water Supply'; A. Sarcina, 'The Private House at Mohenjo-daro', in M. Taddei (ed.), *South Asian Archaeology*, 1997 (1), Naples, 1979, pp. 433-62. S. R. Rao, on the other hand, suggested that a house could be reconstructed on the basis of the presence of baths. In the case of Block 'B' at Lothal, for instance, there are twelve structures, each made up of three rooms and a bath; these have been taken by him to represent separate houses; S.R. Rao, *Lothal: A Harappan Port Town*, Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi, 1979, p. 102.

⁶⁹ I have arrived at these figures by dividing the sq. ft site area mentioned by Fairervis by the sq. ft area of an acre, i.e., 43,560 sq. ft.

Table 1
Population Sizes of Select Sites as Mentioned by Walter Fairbairns

Site	Sq. ft	Total no. of houses & covered area per unit ^a	Estimated population
Kechi Beg	25,200	35 720 sq. ft	210
Damb Sadaat	1,60,000	181 883.9 sq. ft	1,086
Mohenjo-daro	55,00,000	10,428 527.4 sq. ft	41,250
Ghazi Shah	2,36,250	295 800.8 sq. ft	1,770
Amri	8,10,000	1,012.5 800 sq. ft	6,075
Kot Diji	2,40,000	300 800 sq. ft	1,800
Lohumjo-daro	5,40,000	675 800 sq. ft	4,050
Pir Lal	1,99,500	249 801.2 sq. ft	1,494
Chatto	1,47,500	184 801.6 sq. ft	1,104
Pandi Wahi	1,47,500	184 801.6 sq. ft	1,104
Chauro	1,50,000	187.5 800 sq. ft	1,125
Chanhu-daro	7,00,000	875 800 sq. ft	4,950
Judeir-jo-daro	27,00,000	3,375 800 sq. ft	20,240
Harappa (total exclusive of citadel)	31,39,200	3,924 800 sq. ft	23,544
Malir 2	2,26,800	283.5 800 sq. ft	1,701
Nal Bazar	1,51,875	190 799.3 sq. ft	1,140
Amilano	1,13,850	142 801.7 sq. ft	852

Source: W. Fairbairns, Jr., 'The Origin, Character and Decline of the Indus Valley Civilization', in G. Possehl (ed.), *Ancient Cities of the Indus*, New Delhi, 1979, p. 83.

a city like Bombay in 1931 had an average density of 75 persons per acre, even though there were sections such as Umerkhedhi and Mandvi where the density was as high as 413 and 223 respectively.⁸ Similarly, urban and rural settlements of the Indus civilisation were mosaics of residential and non-residential zones; while some zones in a settlement may have had a very

⁸ H.T. Sorley, *Census of India, 1931, Volume LX: The Cities of the Bombay Presidency*, Bombay, 1933, pp. 7-10.

high density, there were others that were more sparsely inhabited. However, since Fairservis did not take this into consideration, he arrived at figures that have to be dismissed as being wholly unrealistic.

Calculating Population Through Habitation Space/Residential Dwellings

Instead of postulating a fixed mathematical relationship between area and population, a more reliable method of estimating population size demands an archaeological assessment of the Harappan settlements themselves. This can be done by working out (i) an area estimate of the residential sector; (ii) details of houses, however limited, with a broad figure of number of persons per unit; (iii) an application of the figure arrived at, from the houses, to the residential area as a whole.

Following this method, one may try to tentatively estimate the population size of Lothal, where information relating to houses, phase-wise (spanning chronologically the mature urban Harappan phase and its devolution), and area-wise within the urban centre, are available in S.R. Rao's excavation report.⁶⁹ Here, the relevant data from Phase II, when the layout of the town was firmly established, will be examined.

The ovoid mound of Lothal is said to measure 934 ft or 284.6 m. (north-south) and 749 ft or 228.2 m. (east-west); this is an area of roughly 16.05 acres or 6.5 hectares.⁷⁰ However, if we were to assess the spatial extent of the settlement,⁷¹ on the basis of the mud-brick wall surrounding it on three sides, with a wharf on the eastern margin, the inhabited section of the town would be smaller, around 14.9 acres or 6 hectares.⁷²

How much of this area may be assumed to be residential? This cannot be very precisely stated but for estimating this, first, it is necessary to ascertain the non-residential areas of the town.⁷³ These would certainly include: (i) the peripheral walls on three sides, whose width is stated to be 42 ft,⁷⁴ which seem to have covered an area of 2.12 acres (0.86 hectares);⁷⁵ (ii) the wharf adjoining the dockyard, which, with a width varying between 64 and

⁶⁹ Rao, *Lothal*.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁷¹ This is desirable because on the western periphery is a cemetery area while the dockyard dominates the eastern margin.

⁷² These calculations are based on the site plan. See Rao, *Lothal*, Plate XXXVIII. The measurements have been made from outside the peripheral walls and wharf.

⁷³ Here, drainage and communication features such as streets, lanes, cesspools and surface drains have not been taken into consideration. These will be estimated separately.

⁷⁴ Rao, *Lothal*, p. 135. The lengths of the three sides have been estimated on the basis of the site plan.

⁷⁵ The calculations for the peripheral wall are as follows:

West: 288 m. $\times$ 12.8 m. = 3,686.4 sq. m

North: 208 m $\times$ 12.8 m = 2,662.4 sq. m

South: 176 m. $\times$ 12.8 m. = 2,252.8 sq. m.

This gives a covered area of 8,601.6 sq. m. or 2.12 acres.

72 ft (an average of 68 ft or 20.7 m.) and a length of 800 ft (243.8 m.) covered 54,400 sq. ft (5,046.6 sq. m.)⁷⁶ or 1.24 acres (0.5 hectares); (iii) Block 'C' or the warehouse in the Acropolis area. Here, the podium on which it was constructed, measuring 160 ft (48.7 m.) × 135 ft (41.1 m.), covered 21,600 sq. ft (2,006.7 sq. m.) or 0.49 acres (0.02 hectares);⁷⁷ (iv) the inter-space between the platform on which the warehouse was constructed and the peripheral wall, varying in width from 16 ft to 28 ft⁷⁸ (average of 22 ft or 6.7 m.) with a length of 115 ft (35.05 m.).⁷⁹ This was rammed with *kankar* and covered an area of 2,530 sq. ft or 235 sq. m. There are other zones which were possibly non-residential as well. For instance, adjacent to the warehouse is Block 'D', a mud-brick platform likely to have been functionally related to the former⁸⁰ but due to heavy erosion its purpose cannot be ascertained. In the absence of positive evidence, it would be judicious to regard it as commercial *cum* residential. This would also be the case with Block 'A' which forms the bazaar part of the Lower town.⁸¹ In these localities, it is best to take roughly half of the covered area as being of a residential nature.

Leaving these for the moment, if the unambiguous non-residential sectors are taken as a whole, these would seem to cover an area of roughly 1,71,116.76 sq. ft or 3.92 acres (1.58 hectares). Expressed as a percentage of what I have taken as the inhabited town area (14.9 acres), this would mean that the clearly demarcated 'public spaces' were 26.3 per cent of the area of Lothal. If the non-residential segment of the commercial *cum* residential sectors is taken into consideration,⁸² which can be considered as covering half of the total covered area of such zones (64,340 sq. ft/5,977.3 sq. m. or 1.4 acres/0.59 hectares),⁸³ this would go up to 36.2 per cent of the fortified township.

One may now take up those areas that were primarily residential which, as the above figures would show, at best covered around 9.58 acres (64.3 per cent) of the settlement. There were several such areas including Block 'B' in the Acropolis, Block 'E' extending beyond the western arm of the

⁷⁶ Rao, *Lothal*, p. 126.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

⁷⁹ The length has been calculated on the basis of the site plan, *ibid.*, Plate XXXVIII.

⁸⁰ Rao also suggests this. As he puts it, the peripheral platforms has no special defensive features and were probably used to 'supervise the transactions in the warehouse and also keep an eye on the ships entering and leaving the dock.' See *ibid.*, p. 87.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁸² These would include (i) Block 'D' m. covering 7,680 sq. ft or 713.4 sq. m.; (ii) Block 'A', the bazaar part of the Lower town with shops and houses, covering 1,21,000 sq. ft or 11,241.2 sq. m. See *ibid.*, pp. 88 and 115.

⁸³ This would be half of the total area which is 1,28,680 sq. ft/11,954.7 sq. m. or 2.95 acres/1.1 hectares.

Acropolis and Block 'F', standing north of Street 8.⁶⁴ Houses in Lothal, unlike those at cities like Mohenjo-daro and Banawali, were not two-storeyed.

Next, considering that in addition to houses, each of the abovementioned zones contained streets, lanes and elements of drainage and sewage systems, it is necessary to ascertain the actual area covered by residences in the various blocks. Satisfactory structural details are available only in the case of Block 'B' of the Acropolis. So, a ratio is offered for that area,⁶⁵ which may then be applied to the residential segment of Lothal as a whole.

The houses, 23 of them, in this segment of Block 'B' seem to have covered 10,738 sq. ft (997.59 sq.m.).⁶⁶ The spatial dimensions of the area itself, criss-crossed by several streets and lanes, covered 20,874.78 sq.ft (1,939.3 sq.m.).⁶⁷ In other words, in a primarily residential block, the houses covered about 51.4 per cent of the total covered area. Thus, of the 9.58 acres of Lothal that were primarily residential, houses stood in roughly 4.9 acres.

Finally, the number of houses and an average figure of persons per house must be suggested. If the 23 house units in 10,738 sq. ft (997.59 sq. m.) of Block 'B' are taken as an index, with an average area of 466.8 sq. ft (43.37 sq. m.) per house, this would mean 457.2 houses in Lothal. As for the probable number of persons per house, this can only be assessed by relying on ethnographic data. Of course, one of the practical problems in arriving at a figure derived from South Asian ethnohistorical contexts is that the sizes of houses in the relevant literature are hardly ever stated. The figures also vary from area to area. In the case of western India, in Mandvi town around 1855-61, there were 40,000 people in 8,000 to 9,000 houses,

⁶⁴ There are also large unexcavated areas within the peripheral walls of Lothal which we may consider as forming primarily residential localities.

⁶⁵ Here, the rectangular area which dominated Block 'B' is examined leaving out the five small houses on the south-east margin. See *ibid.*, Plate LVIII.

⁶⁶ The house details for Block 'B' are as follows. *Street 2*: seven houses, with a total area of 3,339 sq. ft (dimensions given in report); *Street 3*: four houses, to the north, in an area of 1,260 sq. ft (dimensions calculated on the basis of Plate LVIII, since they are not given in the report), *Lane 3*: Nos. 17, 18, 19 which form one house, covering 624 sq. ft (where the dimensions have been calculated on the basis of the Plan of Block 'B', Plate LVIII, it is stated; otherwise, dimensions are as stated in the text of the report) and two more houses (Nos. 21 and 108) covering 432 and 540 sq. ft each (dimensions on the basis of abovementioned plate); *Street 4*: three houses to the north—House 24 covering 500 sq. ft, House 57 covering 1,156 sq. ft, one more house covering 380 sq. ft (dimensions of the last house on the basis of site plan)—and three houses to the south, covering 1,562 sq. ft on the whole (dimensions on the basis of site plan); *Lane 2*: three houses, roughly 945 sq. ft (this is only a rough calculation since the outlines of these are not evident in the site plan nor are the dimensions mentioned in the report).

⁶⁷ This is the covered area of only the actual block made up of the houses, streets, lanes, etc. and not the mud-brick platform or the houses to the north which are shown on Plate LVIII.

roughly 4.4 to five persons per house.¹⁸ On the other hand, in Kheda fort, 4,700 houses were inhabited by 12,000 persons, i.e., 2.55 persons per house.¹⁹ In the case of Kutch as well, in 1872, there were 99,790 persons (20.47 per cent of the population) in 37,785 houses or 2.64 persons per house and 3,87,515 persons (79.52 per cent) in 1,28,593 houses or 2.99 persons per house.²⁰ Considering the size of the average house of Lothal as also the abovementioned figures for Mandvi and Kheda, a figure of roughly three persons per house may be used. This would mean that Lothal's population in Phase II was in the vicinity of 1,372 persons; for the site as a whole this would mean a density of 83 persons per acre (205 persons per hectare), while if only the inhabited segment is considered, this would rise to 92 persons per acre (227 persons per hectare).

Similarly, using this method, a tentative estimate of the size of Mohenjo-daro may be offered, where a detailed study of different house units has been attempted by Anna Sarcina.²¹ If the information provided by her on the extent of the residential sector of the lower city is accurate, it would seem that there is a substantial difference in the built up area and that used for habitation. Of the 56,000 sq. m. that were excavated, 20 per cent consisted of open spaces and streets. Of the remaining area available for investigation, i.e., 44,800 sq. m., the architecture of only 36,000 sq. m. could be interpreted in which roughly 77.7 per cent or 28,000 sq. m. had a residential function. Considering that the citadel mound, not included in Sarcina's study, contained mainly, though not exclusively, public/communal non-residential buildings and facilities, there is a distinct possibility that the ratio of the residential area of Mohenjo-daro in relation to the town area was even less than what Sarcina's figures suggest. The details regarding the house models for one of the structural phases there—the Intermediate period—are briefly summarised here. The total covered area of the 36 houses is 4,009.95 sq. m. which gives us an average of 111.3 sq. m. area for each unit. This would mean, approximately 36.35 houses per acre, and if an average of five persons per house is used,²² the density per acre would be around 181.75 persons. Since it seems that only half of the 100 hectares

¹⁸ J. M. Campbell, *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, V, Kutch, Palanpur and Mahi Kantha, Bombay, 1880, p. 237.

¹⁹ Briggs, *Cities*, pp. 193-94.

²⁰ Campbell, *Kutch*, p. 100.

²¹ Sarcina, 'The Private House'.

²² It is likely that Mohenjo-daro would have a higher number of persons per house than Lothal because many of the houses are double-storeyed. One would, however, not work with a higher figure because, first, we need to consider the fact that some units at Mohenjo-daro which appear to be residential on plan are not actually so. Second, this figure fits in well even with densely populated cities like Amritsar, where the average number of persons per house fluctuated between 4.2 and 5.9 persons per house between 1881 and 1921, with the number of houses per acre varying from 31.36 to 45.29. For Amritsar, see Gauba, *Amritsar*

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(247 acres) contained house units, this would give us a figure of about 22,447 persons for the city. The average population density at Mohenjodaro may then be revised to a figure of about 90 persons per acre (222 persons per hectare).

In the case of Mohenjodaro, we are fortunate insofar as details relating to structural remains and house sizes are available. In those instances, more common in Harappan studies, where there is evidence regarding only a few houses and rooms, an estimate based on those details, keeping in mind the size of the residential sector will have to be made. Similarly, hut sizes at settlements like Kanewal and Zekhada can provide an index to population size. Here also, the residential area will depend on whether the relevant settlement is a sedentary, agricultural one or a camp of animal breeders. Finally, there are a large number of unexcavated Harappan settlements, located in surface surveys where only the dimensions of the mound are available. Population estimates at such sites are bound to be highly provisional but even so, instead of estimating its human size on the basis of the mound area, a more realistic method would keep in mind the nature of the concerned settlement as also the general ratio of the residential segment to the mound size from excavated sites in that area.

Conclusion

The foregoing reassessment of extant Harappan demographic estimates in particular and studies that have used ethnohistorical sources for assessing the sizes of archaeological populations in general, has attempted to show that while ethnographic data have generally been regarded as an aid in interpreting population sizes, they can also be used as a caution. The variability in settlement populations and areas can be so wide that one would hesitate to use an average figure drawn from such evidence in archaeological contexts. Instead, our primary focus should shift to the archaeological record itself. It is likely that detailed site-wise analysis will yield more reliable estimates than approaches which impose blanket indexes from ethnographic parallels of the Middle East or the subcontinent on archaeological remains without adequate scrutiny.

Household size and household structure in western India c. 1700–1950: Beginning an exploration

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Introduction

The notion of modernity (and nowadays, indeed, post-modernity) is one of the central, if implicit, organising principles in most contemporary analyses of social change, and has both encompassed and ousted the earlier notion of the rise of capitalism as being the central element of this process. Common to both these approaches, however, is the belief that the modern era was marked by major changes in the nature of family and household, the general presumption being that the organic solidarity of earlier times was destroyed by the rise of individualism. The fissile nuclear family, with its shortening half-life, is then seen as its ultimate product. In a recent critique, Jack Goody has described such ideas as deriving from 'the Whiggish notion' of an evolutionary movement from collective to individualising forms, whether of marriage, kin terms, lineages or households, as part of

a much wider view of human society which is embodied, for example, in the idea of a shift from communal systems of land tenure to freehold, or from what Marx spoke of as primitive communism to the individual maximization of the entrepreneur under capitalism.¹

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¹ Jack Goody, *The East in the West*, Cambridge, 1996, p. 164.

In this view, historical progress was characterised by the movement towards the individuation of society and the formation of nuclear families. Societies that had not moved towards industrial capitalism (it was assumed) would have had complex or extended families. This simple connection, once established, might be reversed; so Macfarlane could find the origins of the eighteenth century industrial revolution in the individualistic family structure of thirteenth century England! Even with this wonderful initial endowment, it took six centuries to move to an industrial society, and Macfarlane darkly warned possible imitators of the difficulties of this path, and suggested that the costs might outweigh the economic benefits.²

The Whiggish vision, *mutatis mutandis*, also extended to 'traditional India', where the patriarchal patrilineal joint family was thought to have characterised society in past times; the colonial period is held to have inaugurated its decline.³ This is despite the fact that a major national epic is about a joint family feud so ferocious as to leave only a single grandson alive at the end of it: Parikshit, grandson of Arjuna and grand-nephew of Duryodhana. As late as 1968, M.S. Gore could declare that the joint family was 'typical of India' and argue that the nuclear unit, which he defines as characterised by the primacy of the conjugal tie 'has never been fully accepted into the Hindu social system'. Nuclear households were seen by him as incomplete, and moving towards jointness: 'temporarily nuclear households become joint as the sons grow up and get married'.⁴ S.C. Dube similarly, and more emphatically, saw the joint family as the cornerstone of traditional India: '[t]he traditional ethos promoted the ideal of "one for all, all for one" and emphasised collective interest, . . .'.⁵ It was left to Mandelbaum to offer a corrective, and to point out that the joint family was an ideal, and that 'centrifugal forces inevitably build up so that every family sooner or later breaches that ideal'. The likelihood of this occurring (in the twentieth century) was, he pointed out, related to the economic basis of the family—early separation being characteristic of the very poor and the affluent. Cultivating landowners were 'likely to keep up the ideal pattern longer'.⁶ Few contemporary sociologists would dissent from this. Now, *implicit in such a formulation is the view that coresidence is stressful, and that the cost to the individual is bearable to the extent that*

² Alan Macfarlane, *The Origins of English Individualism*, Oxford, 1978, pp. 25, 202. Since English industrial capitalism may not live out its seventh century without infusions of Korean industrial capital and management, further comment on this vision would be redundant.

³ On the other hand, Roland Lardinot suggests that the modern definition of the joint family in fact originated in colonial officialdom's almost simultaneous discovery of private land rights and Sanskrit texts in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. See R. Lardinot 'Peut-on Classer La Famille Hindoue?' *Actes des Recherches en Science Sociales*, Nos 57–58, 1985, p. 34.

⁴ M.S. Gore, *Urbanisation and Family Change*, Bombay, 1968, pp. 36, 39.

⁵ S.C. Dube, *Tradition and Development*, Delhi, 1990, p. 76.

⁶ D. Mandelbaum, *Society in India*, 2 vols., Berkeley, 1970, Vol. I, p. 37.

separation brings serious economic hardship to him or her. This is, evidently, rather different from the 'traditional ethos' that Dube described (in a phrase borrowed from the romances of Alexandre Dumas!).

This brings us to a crucial issue, which is that of the explanatory power of individualistic models of social action. Hans Medick and David Sabean have recently warned against the dissipation of 'otherness' via the use of models 'based on the ideological assumptions of Western individualism . . .'.⁷ Nonetheless, they then go on to ask for a systematic examination of kinship including 'the use of kin in pursuing [various] strategies'. It is obvious that the agent or 'user' in such a formulation is ultimately individual. They also suggest enquiry into historical sources about the nature of individual and family strategies of kinship.⁸ The rest of this article attempts to open some of these issues for historical enquiry, using materials from western India.

The Eighteenth Century Evidence

Omitting the *Mahabharata* legend, evidence is still to be found showing that a fairly 'modern', individualistic and therefore 'nuclearising' outlook was not lacking in pre-colonial India. So, for example, the family records of a middling Brahman family of the west coast, the Pendses, give us an insight into this attitude. Mahadevbhat was one of the joint landlords of the village of Golap in Ratnagiri district; he quarrelled with his brethren and, around 1623, migrated to Dhamapur, where he was granted wastelands by the Sardesai, Mavalankar. He cleared the jungle, prepared paddy fields and planted orchards. Mahadevbhat had three grandsons who inherited the lands. Then, the Mavalankar family usurped some of the orchards: the complaint had to be taken to the revenue minister of the Adilshahi sultan at Bijapur. The three Pendse brothers conferred: one suffered from a wasting illness and could not go; the second said 'I have no son (to inherit); I have no need to trouble myself' and the third reasoned that there would be no one to look after his numerous household, or attend to the manuring and cultivation of his lands and orchards; so he did not go.⁹ The narrative clearly shows how essentially individualistic the attitudes of even the joint owners of an estate could be. The second brother, Bhamba (*sic*), evidently saw his life as futile in the absence of direct descendants. Furthermore, the three while yet joint owners clearly lived and cultivated apart, and took little interest in each others' affairs. Finally, of course, the estate had itself been settled by a man who, it may be recalled, preferred emigration to the proximity of his kin. Of course, one cannot generalise from a single case,

⁷ Hans Medick and David W. Sabean (eds), *Interest and Emotion. Essays on the Study of Family and Kinship*, Cambridge, 1988, p. 2.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 20, *emphasis* original.

⁹ K V Pendse (ed.), *Pendse Kul Vritanta*, Pune, 1938, pp. 157–58.

but what is striking is how little moral indignation one finds expressed in the narration of an episode of fraternal selfishness that led to the permanent loss of valuable lands. This suggests that such conduct was seen as common if not ethically sound.

If this was indeed the case, then stress, social or economic, would result in family fission as individuals within it sought to escape its worst effects. This is hinted at in a proverb (like all proverbs, undatable) collected in the nineteenth century: 'Bring the (grain) measuring bowl and let us separate.'¹⁰ Clearly, the limited grain available would be shared, and the household would disperse. Equally, at such times, the strong might desire to rid themselves of their weaker dependants—especially, perhaps, older women with dependent children, and this would result in the phenomenon of female-headed households which we glimpse in the house-tax records of western Maharashtra. For example, there were 23 houses in the village of Pasalgaon in Raigad district in the mid-eighteenth century; of these, no less than five were headed by widows and could not pay house-tax.¹¹ The Angre rulers of Kolaba state in the early nineteenth century did not exempt such households, but (perhaps) charged them at a lower rate; thanks to Avalaskar, we possess the records for 1807–08 from the little town of Naganva near Bombay. The town contained 223 Brahman households, of which only three were female-headed, and 274 non-Brahman households, of which 27 were headed by women. Thirty-two households lived among the palm groves outside the town; of these two were female-headed.¹² The Brahmins were a relatively affluent caste, and I would suggest that they were therefore better able to absorb widowed or other unattached women into their households—hence the lower incidence of female-headed households among them. Of course, differential mortality might also account for the variation, but I do not think this explanation likely. Even if non-Brahman male mortality was higher than that of Brahmins, young widows in such communities were usually remarried, while Brahmins did not countenance the practice. Therefore, the number of widowed women among the Brahmins should have been higher, yet the proportion of female-headed households was, as we saw, significantly lower.

However, high social status by itself would not have this effect. The hereditary priests at the famous shrine of Amarkantak, the source of the Narmada, were evidently persons of status, but the generally disturbed state of the region around 1820 had impoverished them. They evidently responded by discarding dependent widows with children; in 1821 they told an official visitor that there were seven houses of their family in the place—two headed by separate brothers, who officiated as priests, and five

¹⁰ A. Manwaring, *Marathi Proverbs*, Oxford, 1899; rpt Delhi, 1991, No. 1309.

¹¹ M.D. Apte, 'Sarkari Aaya-Vyaya', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Pune University, 1968, p. 42.

¹² S.V. Avalaskar, *Naganv: Arthuk va Samajik Jivan, 1760–1840*, Pune, 1962, p. 33.

headed by widows.¹³ Economic stress everywhere tended to lead to the creation of small impoverished households: at the same time as Vinayakrao visited Amarkantak, Thomas Marshall inspected the impoverished town of Seroor in northern Karnatak, where he found

nearly a fourth of the dwellings, little wattled huts, each occupied by a single old woman whose friends were either dead or fled, or by a poor day labourer or Sepoy who had not the means of marrying.

Even in the countryside he observed that the smallest households were to be found 'in small hamlets of 8 or 10 huts, which are either just commencing to settle, or have been broken up by the numerous afflictions of the last 20 years'.¹⁴

The Early Colonial Period

With these reports, we have, of course, entered the colonial period when, in addition to house-counts, actual enumerations of persons also become available. All these suggest a relatively small household size, with the implication that the majority of households would be nuclear in structure. They also tell us that the number of households would exceed the number of habitations by a considerable margin. The likely criterion by which coresidents would be divided into families would be separate cooking places; in 1825, Arthur Steele conducted an enquiry into customary law, and noted that family partition 'is proved to have taken place by the parties cooking and eating separately, and by separate performance of religious domestic ceremonies'.¹⁵ The separate hearth was a standard criterion applied by the British censuses that commenced in 1872.

The first study of the colonial period is the account of Loni, a village near Pune, written by the British surgeon Thomas Coats, in 1819. Coats found 106 houses inhabited by 130 families with a total of 557 members (a mean size of 4.3). One hundred and thirty was also the total number of married men, some of whom had two wives, and so it would appear that no married man lived with his father, suggesting a strong bias towards partition in the lifetime of the father. This preference seems to have been particularly strong among landowning peasants (*thalkari*): 55 adult males among them were divided into 50 family units. Lease-holding farmers, by contrast, had larger families, perhaps because they needed more family labour in their operations, and 34 families had 54 adult males in them. On the other hand, almost landless

¹³ British Library, London, Oriental and India Office Collection, MSS, Mar D46, fol. 204b.

¹⁴ Thomas Marshall, *Statistical Reports on the Pergunnahs in the Southern Maratha Country*, Bombay, 1823, p. 127.

¹⁵ Arthur Steele, *The Law and Custom of Hindoo Castes Within the Dukhun Provinces*, 2nd edn, London, 1868, pp. 213-14.

village servants, such as Mahars, had no reason to maintain joint families, and 16 adult males lived in 13 families.¹⁶

In 1822, shortly after Coats' study, the British government carried out a full-scale census of the city of Pune. The city had lost population as a consequence of the fall of the Peshwa, and it is probable that the floating population of beggars, soldiers and camp-followers was reduced, leaving a core of relatively stable households. The number of families recorded was 16,934 and they had a total of 81,402 members or a mean size of 4.8. The total of houses was 10,143, so that there were 1.67 families per house here by contrast to the 1.23 in the less congested village of Loni.¹⁷ I emphasise this point because we shall subsequently use data showing individuals *per house* in order to estimate *household size*, and it is necessary to begin by stating that this necessarily results in an overestimation of true household size. The Pune census also offers some insights into the possible links between caste, occupation and household size. Thus, the Brahmins were a relatively affluent community: only 78 (3.1 per cent) of their 2,507 houses were classified as hutments, although hutments formed 17 per cent of the urban total. Brahmin households were also larger than average, with 5.2 persons per family. More significantly, there were 2.13 adult males per family as against the urban average of 1.72. On the other hand, the *dalit* communities of Mahar, Mang and Halalkhor together had 407 families in 395 houses (mainly huts), and 1.27 adult males per family. In Maharashtra, Mahars often held important hereditary office as watchmen and messengers, and this may have led to a higher degree of cohesion within the Mahar household; at any rate, adult males per household among them (Mahar) numbered 1.48, while among the other two communities it was 1.09. Relatively affluent communities like the Gujarati and Marwari merchants had 1.73 and 2.33 respectively. We may say, therefore, that larger household size was related to affluence and stability, and that the very poor, with no property to inherit and no trade to learn, tended to form separate households early in their life cycle. Before we move on, we should note that households were not necessarily conjugal units of monogamous or indeed polygynous type: various other types were also to be found. So for example, we have the 180 families of (theoretically) ascetic Gosavis, living in 171 houses. These included 556 adult males, 353 juvenile males but only 96 adult women and 24 girls. The Gosavis, as it happens, were soldiers and traders, and purchased or adopted young boys into their order. An unbalanced sex ratio is also to be found among entertainers and prostitutes: so the 45 families of Kalavantin included only 25 men and 12 boys, but 157 women and 61 girls. Similarly, the 106 families of 'Kasbinya' included 39 men and boys as against 227 women and 71 girls. These 106 'families' lived

¹⁶ Thomas Coats, 'Account of the Present State of the Township of Lony', in *Transactions of the Literary Society of Bombay*, Vol. III, 1822, pp. 182-83.

¹⁷ D.R. Gadgil, *Poona: A Socio-Economic Survey, Part II*, Pune, 1952, pp. 42-44.

in only 20 houses. While smaller towns and villages could not support such large bodies practising these special professions, these instances are cited to prevent us from assuming that the only possible household was the conjugally bounded one.

Almost contemporaneously with the Pune census, the newly arrived British authorities also had enumerations made in various parts of eastern Maharashtra and southern Madhya Pradesh. These were in areas lacking large towns, and therefore serve as a contrast to the Pune data. Thus, the little town of Umrad (Umrer), near Nagpur, contained 1,913 houses, with 3,294 adult males, and 9,284 inhabitants, or 1.72 males and 4.85 persons per house. Weaving was an important activity here, and there were 363 houses of the weaver caste (Koshti). As might be expected from the labour-intensive nature of cloth manufacture, the persons per house (8.16) were significantly more numerous than for other communities, and each house had 2.09 male adults. The 758 male adults enumerated operated 652 looms, and there were also 735 women and 376 girls, many of whom probably assisted in textile production. The rural parts of the subdivision were also enumerated at this time. Two thousand six hundred and one houses were counted, and these contained 1.20 adult males and 4.38 persons each. The cultivator caste (Kunbi) had 158 houses with 4.18 persons, and 1.16 adult males in each. We do not possess so much detail for the important town of Chandrapur: here the local officials conformed to past practice and submitted only a list of houses according to community. The types of extra-mural conjugation observed from the Pune data are nonetheless visible here too. The children of Brahmans by slave-women, etc., were termed Vidur, and the 532 houses of Brahmans had generated 169 houses of this community. There were also 44 houses of slave-women (*batki*) living separately, as well as 29 houses of professional dancers.¹⁴

The Pune city census was part of a larger enumeration covering much of western Maharashtra. An abstract of the returns is available, and presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Deccan c. 1820: Household Sizes

<i>District</i>	<i>Families</i>	<i>Houses</i>	<i>Men per family</i>	<i>Persons per family</i>	<i>Persons per house</i>
Poona	63,398	60,139	1.36	4.49	4.74
Ahmadnagar	90,217	81,318	1.46	4.53	5.03
Khandesh	1,03,374	97,209	1.34	4.04	4.30
Dharwad	1,49,152	1,54,611	1.52	4.59	4.43
Satara	1,53,978	1,36,453	1.53	4.78	5.40

Source: *Selections from the Papers at the East India House*, 4 vols., London, 1820-26, Vol. IV, p. 614.

¹⁴ British Library, London, Oriental and India Office Collection, MSS Mar D44, fols 24-27, and 100a.

Slightly later, *circa* 1826–27, W.H. Sykes began a massive survey of the districts of western Maharashtra conquered from the Peshwa in 1818. Here, he again combined a census with a counting of houses so that the data do not list families separately from houses. The returns sent to him by the village accountants and district officers covered 5,219 villages, and he estimated the average number per house as follows:

<i>District</i>	<i>Persons per house</i>
Poona	4.79
Ahmadnagar	4.89
Khandesh	3.96
Dharwad	4.48

Sykes refers to the 1822 census of the Ahmadnagar district during which families had been enumerated, and had averaged 4.53 persons to the family.¹⁹ These large enumerations therefore support the inferences that we had made from limited data, and show that the average family was small, and, in all probability most families were nuclear in structure.

The next two decades saw little change. A similar enumeration in 1846 found a substantially larger population with the following distribution of persons per house:²⁰

<i>District</i>	<i>Persons per house</i>
Poona	5.63
Ahmadnagar	5.48
Khandesh	4.02
Dharwad	4.75
Sholapur	4.53

The boundaries of various districts had changed since the enumeration of 1822, with Sholapur being separated from Ahmadnagar, and a new district, Belgaum, for which data are unavailable, formed out of Dharwad. The city of Poona was included in the district total in 1846, by contrast to 1822, and this may explain the rise in population per house in Poona.

¹⁹ W.H. Sykes, 'Special Report on the Statistics of the Dukhun', in *Reports of the Seventh Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science*, pp. 267–70.

²⁰ See *Report on the Census of Bombay Presidency, 1872*, Bombay, 1875, Vol. 2, Appendix, for this data.

From the Mid-nineteenth to the Mid-twentieth Century

Meanwhile, the colonial administration, tightened its grip over the countryside, the population increased substantially, and, from the 1850s there was a revival of monetisation in the countryside. Land transfers began to occur on an unprecedented scale. The effect of these changes may be sought in data compiled in the course of land revenue settlement operations in Madha subdivision of Sholapur district, which were carried out after an interval of 29 years, or almost a generation apart. The report supplies us with the number of houses, village by village, and classifies the inhabitants into four categories. These are—men below and above 15 years; but women—below 15 and married—are classes that are presumed to exhaust the population (Table 2).

Table 2
Madha Taluka: Changes in Household Size

Year	Houses	Adult males/house	Married women/house	Persons/house
1839	13,002	1.71	1.73	4.93
1868	16,515	1.59	1.64	4.88

Source: Compiled from *Papers Relating to the Second Revision Settlement of the Madha Taluka of the Sholapur District* (Bombay, 1870).

It will be evident that the changes in household size are small, and that they indicate a reduction in the possibility of jointness, either between father and son, or between brothers, since the number of adult males per house has, in fact, declined.

Of course, this relates to a single subdivision, and it would be unsafe to base any extensive generalisation on it; still, we have some mid-twentieth century data that indicate a similar tendency. Detailed information on the basis of a four per cent sample of households was collected in the course of the 1951 census of Bombay state. I have grouped the data into two divisions: the first, north Deccan, is made up of the modern Khandesh, Ahmadnagar, Poona, North Satara and Sholapur districts; the second, south Deccan, contains Belgaum, Bijapur and Dharwar. North Deccan, therefore, very roughly corresponds to the Khandesh, Ahmadnagar and Poona districts of the 1820s; south Deccan approximates to the old Dharwar district (Table 3).

Mean rural household size in 1951 was around 10 per cent higher than that of rural households in 1822, being 5.12 in the south and 5.09 in the north. (Poona was the only important urban centre in 1822 and has been excluded from the data for that year.) If we include urban households at

Table 3
Long-term Changes in Household Size

Region/ period	North Deccan: Persons/house	South Deccan: Persons/house	Male adult/house North Deccan	Male adult/house South Deccan
1820s	4.50	4.59	1.44	1.52
1951	5.09	5.12	1.48	1.57

Source: For 1820s—as in Table 1; for 1951, *Census of India 1951: Vol. IV Bombay, Saurashtra and Kutch Pt. II-B*.

Note: For adjustments in the definition of adult male see text.

both points in time, then the change to 1951 is smaller: mean size then being 4.97 in north Deccan and 5.13 in south Deccan. Rural households in the mid-twentieth century were marginally larger than urban: reversing the situation observed in the early nineteenth century. Some of this small increase seems attributable to the spurt in population growth from the 1920s onwards—the intercensal increase of the Bombay state was 15.6 per cent to 1941, and 23.2 per cent in the next decade. This would enlarge households by swelling the dependency ratio. In this context, the Census Report for 1951 observed that there were 'enough data to suggest that it is dependency that primarily determines family composition . . .'.²¹

The 1951 census provided age data for the sample households in very broad groups: below one, 1–20 years and 21 plus. On the other hand, 15 years was regarded as adulthood for men in the early nineteenth century. Males aged 21 and over averaged 1.17 per household in the general population sample in the north, and 1.22 in the south: this is significantly lower than appears in Table 1, for 1822. At the earlier date, however, men were reckoned adults once they had completed 15 years, and so the two ratios are not directly comparable. However, if we use the age distributions of the 10 per cent sample of 1951 to estimate proportions of males above and below 15, the ratio of adult males per household changes to 1.48 in the north and 1.57 in the south, or very nearly the same as in 1822, when it was 1.44 and 1.52 respectively (see Table 3). Such a small increase could well be caused simply by the prolongation of dependency consequent on the spread of education in a limited number of households. The Census Report of 1951 in fact, concluded after a review of the household data, that 'the composition of the average family household departs from the unitary husband–wife–children pattern only to the extent necessary to take care of dependents'.²² It must be evident that this was equally true of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

²¹ *Census of India*. IV. Pt. I. Report. pp. 5, 107

²² *Census Report* p. 107

Conclusion

In fact, the long-term evidence relating to many thousands of households spread over a wide geographical area completely confirms the suggestion made by A.M. Shah for one Gujarat village that

the widespread notion that all the villagers in traditional India lived in large and complex households composed of two or more married brothers is not true of Radhvanaj. In fact, small and simple households were predominant, and even among the complex ones the large majority were composed of parents and one married son.²³

The high cultural ideal, as Shah points out, may have consistently been that of the joint family but it was, evidently, rarely achieved. This may have been due to biological reasons—the chances of death were too great to make it possible for two or more adult brothers to have a living father—but perhaps as important (I suggest) was the inability of fathers and sons, older brothers and younger brothers, to live together without strong incentive to do so. The organic solidarity and unthinking loyalty of 'traditional society' is, then, merely a traditional myth propagated by power-seeking patriarchs—the real world was intrinsically far more individualistic in its behaviour.

²³ A.M. Shah, *The Household Dimension of the Family in India: A Field Study in a Gujarat Village and a Review of Other Studies*, p. 93.

Approach towards birth control: Indian women in the early twentieth century

Mausumi Manna

Introduction

Studies in Indian demographic history have paid very little attention to the role of voluntary fertility control on reproduction before the inauguration of the state-sponsored campaigns of the 1960s. Further, the role of female agency in population control has largely been neglected by historians, even though the diverse performances of different Indian states in the sphere of population control can only be understood if this is taken into account. This article begins to redress the historical neglect of these issues, through a survey of the major trends in the birth control debate in India, and especially in eastern India, during the period 1920–1936. Although educated Indians were exposed to the activities of the neo-Malthusians and modern birth control propagandists before the beginning of the century, active participation by Indians in this debate started only around this time.¹

Participants in the debate ranged from eminent personalities, government officials, politicians, religious leaders, professionals and women's organisations to common men and women whose reaction was sought by both the advocates and opponents of birth control. Basic issues addressed in the debate were: the fear of the Malthusian consequence of over-population and aspiration of women to free themselves from the pain, hazard and bondage associated with uncontrolled pregnancies and childbirth.

¹ In 1878 Annie Besant's *Law of Population* was published in England. When Besant faced trial in England for reprinting Charles Knowlton's *Fruits of Philosophy*, Indian newspapers gave good coverage to the case. Nripendra Kumar Basu reports that a Bombay merchant anticipated a good market for the book and imported copies of *Law of Population*. He apparently made a good profit. See Basu's *Janmo Saron*, Fourth edition, Calcutta, 1350 B.S., p. 243.

The interesting point to note here is that although the neo-Malthusians propagated birth control, Malthus himself was very much against artificial birth control. To him, the only relevant question was multiplication of the working class beyond the economy's demand for labour and availability of wage goods. The issue of women's reproductive right never arose, given the socio-religious context in which *An Essay On The Principle of Population* was written.

But the birth control movement included women like Annie Besant and Marie Stopes in England, and Margaret Sanger in America, for whom the question of women's reproductive health and rights was as important as that of population control and some sympathetic male voices joined them on this issue.

In India, too, a sympathetic attitude was developing among liberal-minded men towards women's reproductive health since the nineteenth century. Attention started being paid to the nutrition and care of the pregnant and the new mothers, and to improved hygiene during delivery. The provincial governments also addressed this matter. Those women who were fortunate enough to receive education and could express themselves also showed their concern. For instance, the nineteenth century women's magazines in Bengal regularly published articles on mother and child health care.² A number of periodicals also appeared which dealt with both ayurvedic and allopathic medicines and treatment during this time. These magazines, too, discussed pregnancy care and related topics. Thus, the reproductive health aspect of birth control could easily draw support in its favour.³ The high and rising infant and maternal mortality was a matter of common concern, and the supporters of birth control advocated contraception as a method of reducing it.

Except for the orthodox people who were reluctant to accept any change, nobody could deny the importance of controlling the numerous births that were detrimental to the mother's health. But whether artificial methods should be allowed to control birth was a subject of debate. Some even

² Periodicals by women or for women like *Vamabodhini Masik Patrika O Samalocana*, *Antakpur*, *Mahila* and others in the nineteenth century discussed women's health and pregnancy care. See Meredith Borthwick's *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal, 1849-1905*, Princeton, 1984, chapter 5, pp. 151-85.

It is not necessary that the magazines dealing with pregnancy care also talked of birth control. For example, the women's magazine *Bangalakshmi* upheld the image of traditional motherhood but regularly published articles on reproductive health. Kamala Sen, a regular contributor in *Bangalakshmi*, discussed pregnancy care in the form of a letter from a mother to a daughter.

³ According to Nripendra Kumar Vasu, the first Bengali book on birth control methods was written by Nagendra Mukhopadhyaya, named *Kanyader Pratikar*. First published in 1914, 20,000 copies of the book were eventually sold. The first article in Bengali on birth control was written by Nripendra Kumar, which was published in the periodical *Sastha Samachar*, in 1330 B.S., (1927) where, subsequently, many other articles by him came out. See Vasu's *Janmo Saron*, preface to the fourth edition.

feared that modern birth control methods (henceforth m.b.c.m.) would actually have an adverse effect on the health of the users. The most alarmed were the guardians of popular morality who envisaged m.b.c.m. as a dangerous weapon which could be used by immoral men and women to satisfy sexual lust without the fear of pregnancy.

Opinions were also divided regarding whether to allow m.b.c.m. for the purpose of population control. In fact people debated whether India was at all on the way to the Malthusian equilibrium or was it simply propaganda by the Imperial Government to hide its incapability behind the veil of over-population. Anxiety was also expressed that by adoption of m.b.c.m. the expansion of races in India would be endangered. The question was also raised whether the population increase of all classes should be checked or only that of the 'culturally inferior poor people', who were breeding thoughtlessly.

Participants in the debate mostly expressed their spontaneous thoughts and often neglected the elements of conflict in their statements. Broadly speaking, the arguments of the opponents centred mainly around the question of morality and race degeneration,⁴ while its supporters championed causes such as protection of women's and children's health, improvements of the quality of children, and a reduction of economic burden on the family and the economy. In the writings by women, protection of health received greater emphasis than the question of population control. But the propagandists of surplus population did not overlook the issue of reproductive health. The demand for women's reproductive right was also raised, but only by a small section.

This observation is important given the fact that in another 15 to 20 years, the issue of reproductive health and reproductive rights was sidetracked and the control of population was considered a must, in the interest of the social economy. India's first prime minister, Nehru, felt that without population control the target of economic development could not be achieved: 'meanwhile we have to deal with this tremendous problem and every delay in controlling it makes it more difficult of solution.'⁵ In the post-independence population control programme, the control of population received greater attention than the protection of reproductive health. This is more apparent in the implementation of the family planning policies than the policies themselves. The draft outline of the first five-year plan also had the twin emphasis on population control and women's health.⁶ In the meeting of the Central Family Planning Council on 7 October 1967 to

⁴ Race degeneration here means the reduction of population of the race. The idea of degeneration here involves the notion that prosperity of a race depends on the multiplication of its number as well as the quality of education and culture.

⁵ Jawaharlal Nehru, cited in the Foreword of S. Chandrasekhar's book, *Population and Planned Parenthood in India*, London, 1955.

⁶ The First Five Year Plan—A Draft Outline, 1951, pp. 16-17.

recommend liberalisation of Indian Abortion Law, S. Chandrasekhar, the mastermind behind the Indian Family Planning Policy, expressed his personal, radical, view that women should not be treated as mere human incubators, but should be given the freedom to decide on their own motherhood. However, what prompted liberalisation of the abortion law in actual practice was not the urge to give women freedom over reproductive function, but to reduce population pressure. Similarly, although maternal and child health is an important component of the family welfare function, a gross neglect of reproductive health is noted in the target-based implementation of the sterilisation programme, with its greater emphasis on female, than on male sterilisation. This, we feel, is in some sense a violation of the spirit in which the birth control debate started in India.

In the broad context of the debate, we have attempted to locate the approach of different classes of Indian women towards this debate, with a special focus on the activities in Bengal. The choice of Bengal is more owing to my familiarity with the local context and the vernacular literature on birth control, than for any other reason. Bombay was the pioneer in the birth control activities, followed by Madras. Some amount of dissatisfaction existed in Bengal regarding the slow pace of birth control there.⁷ On the other hand, Bengal took an active part in women's emancipation and in the nationalist movement. The silence of many prominent women writers and leaders from Bengal over the issue of birth control is also worthy of notice.⁸

Contraceptive Innovation and Women's Aspiration

From the women's point of view, innovation of modern birth control techniques was a major event in history.⁹ It gave women an opportunity to free themselves from the biological destiny of motherhood in a scientific and certain way. The idea of birth control is in no way a modern innovation because of the existence of various traditional methods, beliefs and customs, both in preventing conception and in abortions.¹⁰ This points

⁷ Professor Phadke established the Bombay Birth Control League in 1923. The Neo-Malthusian League in Madras was started in 1928 by Sri V. Rameshan, a Madras High Court judge. In 1930 Dr Sailendranath Singh founded the Neo-Malthusian Society of Bengal.

⁸ Sarala Devi Choudhurani, the founder secretary of the Bharat Stree Mahamandal took a leadership in women's education and other welfare activities. But she did not take such an active role with respect to the birth control movement.

Similarly Indira Devi Choudhurani has written abundantly with regard to women's health and education. The AIWC Calcutta conference (1933) took a resolution with regard to both birth control and abduction of girls and women. Indira Devi wrote enthusiastically about the latter but did not show that kind of interest with regard to the former.

⁹ See Gosta Carlsson, 'The Decline of Fertility, Innovation or Adjustment Process', *Population Studies*, 20(2), 1966, pp. 149-74.

¹⁰ For instance, the babus of Calcutta who regularly frequented brothels and also indulged in other illicit sexual relations mentioned herbs and seeds supposedly used for abortions in their shopping list every month. See Avanti Kumar Sanyal, *Baboo*, Pratikshan Publication Pvt. Ltd, Calcutta, 1987, pp 48-49.

to a desire to control birth in the pre-contraceptive era. Given the low age at which most women were married in India, the birth of the first child occurred at an age when motherhood was more a compulsion than a matter of choice.¹¹

The control over women's power of procreation in the interest of society alienates women from the act of procreation in the sense that they no longer remain the owners of the fruits of their wombs. But the cost of procreation in terms of health, time and risk of mortality remains. It is, thus, only rational to presume that Indian women whole-heartedly welcomed something like m.b.c.m. which gave them the option to avoid reproductive hazards whenever they desired.

On the other hand, society tries to compensate women by attaching high social prestige to motherhood. Contraception makes motherhood optional only in a biological sense. It does not alter the social conditions and compulsions under which women give birth. In India, the image of the all-sacrificing mother is glorified to an almost unlimited extent. By maintaining this image, an Indian woman stands the chance of attaining even godhood.

It was thus not too easy for the Indian women to accept m.b.c.m., as our idea of rational action would suggest. This dilemma becomes clear from the following passage of Anindita Devi.¹²

Human beings are slaves of custom, tradition and habits. Even if you remove the iron chains from their feet, they try to cling to those chains. Because women are more strongly bound by traditions, they are more reluctant to change. By the innovation of birth control, science has freed motherhood from the age-long slavery and has made it the real object of glory, pride and joy. But women, instead of expressing their sincere gratitude, are often opposed to it.

(translation mine)

Although this dilemma existed, there is ample evidence that women, in gradually increasing numbers, were adopting m.b.c.m., when the information and the devices were made available to them.

The fact that society requires to control women's fertility and, at the same time, to encourage procreation through an external stimulus like the enhancement of social prestige in itself suggests the possibility of a discrepancy between the fertility goal of women and of the community. A woman's response to m.b.c.m. would depend on how she weighs the loss of social prestige against the relief from repeated childbirths. This response is also subject to exposure to information, support from the family and peer groups, as well as individual ability to go against the tide.

¹¹ Although the 'Age of Consent' debate started much earlier, around 1891, marriage and motherhood for most girls occurred within adolescence.

¹² Anindita Devi, 'Janmo-Niyantran', *Jayastree*, Varanasi, 1341 B.S., p. 85.

Explanations of the fertility transition, in terms of modernisation, largely emphasise women's education and employment outside the home.¹³ It is assumed that educated women can more easily adopt and effectively use m.b.c.m. Education also increases the prospect for employment. Employment reduces the mother's time available for children and thus reduces fertility demand. Although the negative relationship between women's employment and fertility demand has not received sufficient empirical support, the negative relationship between education and fertility is more universally recognised.¹⁴

But if reproductive health hazards are considered important motives for wanting to adopt m.b.c.m., there is no reason why the lack of education and employment should stand in the way of adoption of m.b.c.m. We feel that neither education nor employment are necessary prerequisites for a desire to limit the number of pregnancies, provided the exposure to the knowledge of contraception and access to services is not conditioned by either education or employment or both.

The history of birth control in India provides us with evidence in support of our claim. In the early 1920s, the availability of contraceptive facilities was limited. The Society for the Study and Promotion of Family Hygiene, with financial help from the American Birth Control League, opened birth control clinics, first in Bombay, then in Madras, Calcutta, Lucknow and other cities. Since most of these clinics were located in the towns, uneducated rural women hardly had any access to the knowledge and services available in them.

The Bombay clinic, which we called 'Women's Free Welfare Clinic', was mostly attended by women workers of the cotton mills. It is difficult to say how all working-class women would have responded if they had similar access and how much their working status had affected such response. But their lack of formal education did not prevent the cotton mill workers to adopt m.b.c.m. at a time when many educated Indian women hesitated to use it.

¹³ One of the earliest attempts to explain the fertility differences between the traditional and modern societies is the theory of demographic transition by W. Thompson, Notestein and others. Expansion of female education as well as increase in labour force participation by women are believed to be the result of the process of modernisation. A modern micro-economic theory of fertility demand, initiated by H. Leibenstein and later formalised and developed by G. Becker, J. Mincer, T.W. Schultz, R. Easterlin and others of the Chicago school, postulates a negative relationship between female education, female labour force participation, and fertility demand. For a summary reading on this subject refer to T.W. Schultz (ed.), *Food for the World*, Chicago, 1945, and *Economics of the Family, Marriage and Children*, Chicago, 1974; and Gary Becker, *A Treatise on Family*, Chicago, 1981; John C. Caldwell, *Theories of Fertility Decline*, New York 1982; R.A. Easterlin and E.M. Crimmins, *The Fertility Revolution*, Chicago, 1985.

¹⁴ See Susan Cochrane, *Education and Fertility: What Do We Really Know?*, Baltimore, 1979; and H.J. Graff, 'Literacy, Education and Fertility: Past and Present, A Critical Review', *Population and Development Review*, 5(2), pp. 105-40.

The urban middle class who could afford the market price bought the devices to prevent birth from the shops. There were many such shops in the major cities. Young married women from the middle class were the most enthusiastic acceptors both for reasons of economy and health. Although female education was spreading among the middle class, opportunity for women to work outside the home was severely limited by social custom and by non-availability of suitable 'respectable jobs'. Most of these women were thus economically dependent and availability of time was not the major factor in their desire to limit the number of childbirths.

The All India Women's Conferences had discussed the issue of birth control since 1930.¹⁵ The proceedings show that elderly and unmarried women, who had either passed the reproductive age or never experienced the pain, opposed birth control. Margaret Cousins quoted from the experience of the AIWC Calcutta conference, 1933, that a young mother concluded her speech by saying that 'no matter how the elders and unmarried women disapprove, we younger women are going to have birth control'.¹⁶ Anindita Devi also supported this.¹⁷

Margaret Sanger's account of her meeting with ordinary Indian women during her visit in 1935-36 confirms that young women who were bearing reproductive responsibilities at that time wanted to hear more about birth control. A detailed account of her experience at Travancore brings this point more clearly. The State Medical Officer of Travancore accompanied Sanger to a meeting with about forty to fifty women, each sitting with a child on her lap. The Medical Officer warned Sanger that, 'these women have been brought up to the duty of having children and are so shy and modest that they would not listen to anything on birth control'. There was a Mohammedan girl in the meeting who had a sickly baby. Sanger asked her age. One woman replied: 'Twenty'

Sanger: 'How many children has she?'

Reply: 'Three.'

Sanger: 'Did she have more?'

Reply: 'Two died.'

Sanger: 'How old is this one?'

Reply: 'Five or six months.'

Sanger: 'Wouldn't she prefer to wait until this baby is strong and well before she has any more?'

¹⁵ See Aparna Basu and Bharati Roy, *Women's Struggle. History of the All India Women's Conference, 1927-1990*, New Delhi, 1990, p. 81, and also Margaret Cousins' observation, 'In other direction during these years the Conference fully discussed birth control and ranked in its favour when directed by medical clinics', in Margaret Cousins (ed.), *Indian Womanhood Today*, Allahabad, 1941, p. 44

¹⁶ Margaret E. Cousins, 'Impressions of Women's Conference in Calcutta', *Stree Dharma*, February 1934, p. 158.

¹⁷ Anindita Devi's 'Janmo-Niyanttran', pp. 85-93.

This woman had no opportunity to answer; the whole flock moved up: 'I do! We do! Has this lady something like that? That's what we want'.¹⁸

Sanger does not give us a detailed account of these women except to say that they were young, married with children and included both Hindus and Muslims. From the statement of the medical officer one can guess them to be ordinary wives and mothers with little or no education.

The birth control debate was mainly confined to middle and upper class women. The powerful women's organisations at that time, the Women's Indian Association (WIA), the All India Women's Conference (AIWC), and the National Council of Women in India, who actively propagated for m.b.c.m. mostly represented the elites and educated middle class women. The annual conferences of these organisations were held in major cities and towns and received publicity in the print media, to which the uneducated women were not exposed. All India Radio, Bombay, gave some publicity to m.b.c.m. Both Sanger and How Martyn spoke on AIR, Bombay.¹⁹ Given the state of development of transport and communications at that time, and in absence of any propaganda in the mass media, one can easily guess how information regarding m.b.c.m. reached the mass of Indian women. Even if information reached them, services certainly did not.

The purpose of the above observation is to counter the theory that a large family size in the traditional societies is the result of high demand for low cost children.²⁰ Child cost in economic terms might not have been high in the predominantly agricultural society in India, where children's economic contribution was significant. But child cost in terms of the reproductive health of the mother was always high and there existed an unmet demand for contraceptives. This importance of women's reproductive health in calculating the cost and demand for children has escaped the attention of fertility transition theory based on the principle of modernisation.

This is not too surprising given the fact that it has taken two decades from Bucharest (1974) to the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development (1994) to recognise the demand for gender equality, reproductive health care and choice by men and women to decide fully and responsibly the number and timing of their children and the access to the information to do so. That these demands are being raised for a fairly long time is clear from a reading of the history of the birth control movement in India.

¹⁸ Margaret Sanger, *An Autobiography*, New York (1938), 1970, pp. 480-81.

¹⁹ How Martyn was the Director of the Birth Control Information Centre in London. She visited India before Sanger, during early 1935.

²⁰ See Lant H. Pritchett, 'Desired Fertility and the Impact of Population Policies', *Population and Development Review*, March 1984, pp. 1-54.

Surplus Population in India, Race Degeneration and the Duty of Women in India

Jyotirmoyee Devi attended one of the discussions on birth control held in Calcutta during December 1936, when Margaret Sanger was visiting the city. She observed that the 'foreign women' present in the meeting blamed India's growing population for her poverty, at which a section of the Indians present there protested. Jyotirmoyee herself championed the ideal of a small family so as to improve the quality of child care, given the limited resources of middle class parents.²¹ Many Indians identified the activities of the neo-Malthusians at that time as a conspiracy to reduce the races of India and accused the Imperial Government of promoting birth control in India in an indirect manner.²²

There might have been some substance in these accusations. Since 1911, the census commissioners were discussing the evils of over-population.²³ Lord Dufferin, Sir Charles Eliot, Lord Carmichael and many provincial governors mentioned India's increasing population at several points of time. While the French Government banned all activities in relation to birth control in the French colonies in India, the British Government's stand was somewhat ambiguous. Except for occasional raids on shops selling books on family planning on charges of obscenity, the Government did not interfere in the birth control activities.²⁴

In 1933, Colonel Russell, the Public Health Commissioner in India, noted a constant fall in death rate since the influenza epidemic of 1918-19. He recorded a population increase of 18 million between 1931-1933. But not all Indians were happy with the statistics of Colonel Russell. Professor P.J. Thomas, a professor of Indian economy at Madras University countered

²¹ Jyotirmoyee Devi, 'Janmo-Samson Alocon', *Jayastree*, Paush, 1339 B.S., p. 754-58, and 'Ma-Baap O Santan', *Jayastree*, Vaisakh, 1342 B.S., pp. 43-45.

²² Raibahadur M.C. Raja accused that while the advertisement and sale of birth control devices were forbidden in the European countries including England, they were being tolerated in India, *Journal of Indian Medical Association* (henceforth JIMA), September 1933, p. 75. The Chaitra issue of the periodical *Prabasi* in 1341 B.S. protested against the indiscriminate sale and advertisement of birth control devices in India, p. 897. The Paush 1336 issue of *Vangabari* in an editorial comment cautioned against the sale of this dangerous weapon in India. The above are illustrative examples of the anxiety of a section of Indians over the spread of birth control in India. Their anxiety proves that m.b.c.m. were gradually becoming popular.

²³ In fact, as modern demographers find, India's population was indeed increasing marginally since 1900, with a positive growth rate since 1920 (the year described as the year of Great Divide in India's demographic history). See, among others, Tim Dyson, *India's Historical Demography: Studies in Famine, Disease, and Society*, London, 1989; and N. Krishnaji, *Population Pressure, 1891-1981: Regional Variations and Consequences*, R.C. Dutt Memorial Lecture, Calcutta, 1996.

²⁴ Medical News and Notes, *JIMA*, August 1933, p. 501.

Russell.²⁵ Thomas also entered into a similar argument in the first Indian Population Conference held in Lucknow, 1936, which was made alive by statistics and counter-statistics from both the supporters and opponents of birth control.²⁶ Dr Radhakamal Mukherjee, an eminent member of the Society for the Study of Family Hygiene and the convenor of the conference, stated that between 1911–1934, the Indian population increased by 22 per cent while the total area under foodgrains increased by only 6 per cent. Allowing for 2,400 calories per head per day as the minimum nutritional requirement, the food shortage in India in 1935 was 48.8 billion calories.²⁷ Posing counter-statistics, Professor Thomas, the President of the session in economics argued that between 1900–1929, India's food production had increased by 29 per cent while the population increase was only 13 per cent. Thomas felt that population control was no solution to India's poverty and malnutrition. Better education, fairer distribution of income, improvements in rural employment, irrigation, transport and supply of electricity were more important. Thomas' stand on the question of women's reproductive health is not mentioned in the report.²⁸

Among the eminent personalities who supported the cause of birth control, Rabindranath Tagore extended whole-hearted support to m.b.c.m., both for population control and for the protection of women's health. We quote from a letter written by him to Margaret Sanger on 23 November 1935.²⁹

I am of the opinion that the birth control movement is a great movement not only because it will save women from enforced and undesirable maternity, but because it will help the course of peace by lessening the number of surplus population of a country scrambling for food and space outside its own rightful limits. In a hunger-stricken country like India, it is a cruel crime thoughtlessly to bring more children to existence than could properly be taken care of.

Here, his concern for women's health is clearly noted. But his stand vis-à-vis the population problem is ambiguous. He supported the age-old theory that over population was a cause of ancient wars and aggression, but is there any contemporary connotation in the use of this example in a 1935

²⁵ *The Statesman*, 7 December 1935.

²⁶ For reporting on the first Indian Population Conference, see *JIMA*, January 1936, p. 218, and *Prabasi*, Phalgun, 1342 B.S., p. 741.

²⁷ Radhakamal was also very much concerned about the adverse effect of population growth on environment. See Radhakamal Mukhopadhyaya, 'Lokbridhi O Praktik Biparjoi', *Prabasi*, Ashwin, 1342 B.S., pp. 762–64.

²⁸ *JIMA*, March 1936, p.

²⁹ Unpublished correspondence between Rabindranath Tagore and Sanger preserved at the Rabindra Bhavan, Varanasi, Santiniketan.

letter? In the second part of the quoted passage, he mentioned the economic responsibility of individual parents, not entering into controversial issues such as the relationship between India's surplus population, poverty and the position of the Imperial Government.

Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose also spoke in favour of birth control for population control. In his Presidential address at the Haripura Session of the Indian National Congress in 1936, he commented that 'with regard to the long period problem for a free India, the first problem to be tackled is that of our increasing population'.²⁹

The problem of surplus population has a micro and macro aspect. Rabindranath, Jyotirmoyee Devi and others who favoured m.b.c.m. for economic reasons mostly dealt with the problem of the individual family to maintain many children, Bose, Radhakamal and Thomas debated over the macro impact of over population on the resources of the country.

Periodicals like the *Prabasi* and the *Bichitra* in Bengali and the *Modern Review* in English opposed m.b.c.m. on the grounds of race degeneration. These periodicals, which shared a progressive view with regard to women's health, education etc., also revealed some amount of Hindu chauvinism and opposed m.b.c.m. for the fear of race degeneration of the Bengalee Hindu middle class.³¹

This fear probably originated in a similar fear experienced by the exponents of the white supremacy. *Prabasi* and *Modern Review*, both edited by Ramananda Chattopadhyaya quoted a population survey by C. Richet, 1934.³² The report remarked that the population of the yellow and the mixed race was increasing and that of the white race was falling. Among the whites, Europeans, being superior than others, were decreasing in number faster than the others. An analogy was drawn, in both the *Modern Review* and the *Prabasi*, from Richet's report that in India, the educated middle class, being superior in culture, was decreasing in numbers by adopting birth control and encouraging late marriage among educated young men and women.³³

The exponents of the race degeneration theory repeatedly reminded women of their duty to maintain the race. For example, Satyendranath Vasu explained that the English population had started declining ever since the English women had developed the tendency to imitate men, keep short

²⁹ See Dr C.B. Mamoria, *Population and Family Planning in India*, chapter 5, India's Public Opinion and Population Control, Allahabad, 1959, p. 76. Basu's *Janmo-Saron* also mentions this speech, p. 260.

³¹ We may mention two articles in this connection: Kesh Das, 'Bangalee Hindu Dhangson-mukh', *Prabasi*, Aswin, 1342 B.S., pp. 774-78; Kabcharan Mitra, 'Bharat ki Dhangser Pathe?', *Bichitra*, *Jashtha*, 1338 B.S., pp. 768-72; and a report in *Prabasi*, Agrahayan, 1338 B.S., p. 271, which uses the census data between 1911-1931 to argue that Bengali Muslims were increasing their race faster than Bengali Hindus.

³² Charles Richet was the winner of the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1913.

³³ The *Modern Review*, June 1934, p. 456; and the *Prabasi*, Ashadh, 1341 B.S., p. 447.

hair and neglect their domestic duties. He shuddered at the thought of Bengalee women reading the binomial theorem, when their housework was being neglected.²⁴ *Prabasi* reminded modern women that though they ridiculed those women who give birth to many children, in actual practice the mother of many children is bestowed with great honour. Surendranath Bhattacharya, an ardent supporter of m.b.c.m., presented interesting stories of orthodox chauvinism. In the first story, a Hindu guru advised that the most glorious death for a Hindu woman is to die in the process of giving birth to as many children as possible, like a species of crab which dies immediately after the birth of its offspring. Hearing this, the devotees cheered and clapped. In the second story, a doctor advises a wealthy gentleman not to risk having any more children as this would endanger his wife's life. The man replied that, he could remarry if the wife dies, but he is unable to do the cruel act of preventing the birth of his children.²⁵ While these stories may sound slightly exaggerated, they may not also be totally unreal.

The more liberal-minded opponents had to take a different attitude with respect to the question of women's health. In fact, *Prabasi*, *Bichitra* and *Modern Review*, which otherwise had a liberal attitude towards women, had to deny the beneficial effect of m.b.c.m. on women's health. Rather, they complained that m.b.c.m. destroyed women's health, exposed the users to serious diseases, etc. Some opposed artificial birth control on the ground that it was unnatural, but supported natural methods such as the safe period, withdrawal and coitus interruptus. We can call this approach a compromise between the two extremes.

But this compromise could not satisfy those who opposed birth control on grounds of morality. The question of morality also had a strong influence on the supporters of birth control. In their propagation for m.b.c.m. they had always been careful not to be branded as supporters of immorality. The Indian Medical Association had to accept an amendment to its resolution on the inclusion of m.b.c.m. in the curriculum of medical schools and colleges, of the order that this knowledge would be imparted only to married women. But the ideology of 'Brahmacharya' or 'Sanjam' apparently had an answer to limiting birth without immorality.

The most committed preacher of the principle of moral restraint ('Sanjam' or 'Brahmacharya') was M.K. Gandhi.²⁶ The idea of 'Sanjam' within

²⁴ Satyendranath Vasu, 'Nari Pragati', *Vangalakshmi*, Ashadh, 1337 B.S., p. 176

²⁵ Surendranath Bhattacharya, 'Santan Nirodh Bangalir Kartavya Kina?', *Jayasree*, Ashadh, 1342 B.S., pp. 233-36.

²⁶ See M.K. Gandhi, *Self Restraint vs Self Indulgence*, Ahmedabad, 1947. A number of essays from these book are re-compiled (often under a different heading) in Anand T. Hingorani (ed.) *Birth Control*, Bombay, 1949, and R K Prabhu (ed.) *Birth Control: The Right Way and the Wrong Way*, Ahmedabad, 1959.

marriage to protect reproductive health predates Gandhi's 'Brahmacharya'.⁷⁷ At some point of time Gandhi was not opposed to natural methods of birth control such as the safe period. But later he refused to accept anything less than 'Brahmacharya'. Meetings with famous birth control activists like How Martyn or Sanger failed to convince him.⁷⁸ Gandhi's rigidity made him immensely unpopular among the supporters of m.b.c.m. But, in theoretical terms, Gandhi's ideal of 'Brahmacharya' does not conflict with his concern for women's reproductive health or reproductive rights. Rather, under this principle, women enjoy the right to decide when to accept intercourse for procreation (because otherwise it is a sin) and even the right to refuse sex to their husbands (because they themselves are sexually passive). Critiques of Gandhi attacked him mainly on the impracticality of his theory. Until everybody attains the power of marital 'Sanjam' women would suffer repeated childbirths. Lajpat Rai opposed Gandhi's 'Brahmacharya' on the ground that 'with all the exhortations of the 'Swamis' and 'Mahatmas', ordinary people simply cannot practice it'. About the freedom of women within 'Brahmacharya', Rai commented that women act as a willing party in child bearing, just as Indians are the consenting subjects of England.⁷⁹

The principle of 'Brahmacharya' also received support from liberal Muslims advocating the emancipation of Muslim women. The Bengali periodical *Masik Muhammadi* was one of the representatives of liberal Muslim ideology. Writings on *Masik Muhammadi* invited discussions, within the community, on birth control and the necessity to protect women's health. But it was also difficult for them to accept m.b.c.m. on the grounds of religious taboos. Torab Ali described the use of m.b.c.m. as a sin and advised marriage of girls after attaining maturity and 'Sanjam' by the husbands of a sick and feeble wife.⁸⁰

To summarise, the neo-Malthusians in India welcomed m.b.c.m. in order to control population, but also focused on reproductive health. The position of the anti-m.b.c.m. conservatives with respect to women's health was ambiguous. The preachers of the race degeneration theory expected women to bear many children. But liberals who were concerned with women's health but could not support m.b.c.m. either on grounds of

⁷⁷ For instance, the *Varnabodhini Masik Patrika O Samalocana* discusses the need to maintain restraint by married couples to protect the health of both men and women. See Jaishtha, 1327 B.S., pp. 25-27, and Aswin, 1328 B.S., p. 206.

⁷⁸ See the essay 'Mrs Sanger and Birth Control', in M.K. Gandhi's *Self Restraint vs Self Indulgence*, p. 201-8, and also 'Three Birth Control Enthusiasts', from *Birth Control. The Right Way and Wrong Way*, p. 51-58.

⁷⁹ Lajpat Rai, 'Women's Problems', *Siree Dharma*, February 1928, Virva-Bharati Central Library, Santiniketan, page numbers mutilated.

⁸⁰ Torab Ali, 'Janmo Sason O Bangalee Musalman', *Masik Muhammadi*, Chaitra, 1334 B.S., p. 372-74.

morality or to prevent race degeneration, favoured moral restraint within marriage.

The Dilemma between Glorious Motherhood and Controlled Reproduction

Indian women's initial exposure to the population question was through the Irish women active in the Indian nationalist movement. Nationalist sentiment was the strongest feeling during the period and was the dominating force in any movement, including the mainstream women's movement. In addition to becoming good wives and good mothers, aspirations of the modern Indian women in that period included active participation in the nationalist movement.

The initiators of the women's organisations in India, WIA and later AIWC, Margaret Cousins and Annie Besant, had a neo-Malthusian approach to the population problem. A reading of Margaret Noble's view on the population problem shows her concern with over-population, but also mentions the distributive aspect.⁴¹ From the writings of Indian women on birth control, however, it is not clear where they stood in the controversy over-population versus imperial rule and unjust distribution theories of Indian poverty.

The central focus of the birth control debate among women was on maternal and child welfare. Women in the medical profession were also investigating the relationship between maternal mortality and parity.⁴² The issue of women's health provided the common ground for agreement, in the otherwise loosely structured forum like WIA and AIWC. The members of these mainstream women's organisations included women from the royal families, wives and daughters of civilian officials and other dignitaries, as well as women established in their own right, as doctors, teachers, nurses, from all communities and religions. Some members were more politically active than the others, but the women's organisations were not political parties. Although they had a secular character, catholic missionaries had a strong voice in the organisations, and in the question of birth control they strictly observed the ruling of their religion by always voting against it.

The spirit of the supporters of m.b.c.m. within the organisation is expressed in the following quote of S.C. Mukherjee, the honorary organising secretary for the AIWC Trivandrum session (1935-36) attended, among others by Margaret Sanger.⁴³

⁴¹ Margaret Noble, 'The Relation Between Famine and Population', *Selected Essays of Sister Nivedita*, Second Indian Edition, Madras, 1927, pp. 95-122.

⁴² Report of the National Council of Women in India, Sixth Biennial Report, 1936-37. See the section on Maternal Mortality, pp. 50-53. Also, articles in several issues in the *JIMA* written by medical professionals from both sexes focused on the relation between women's health and Parity.

⁴³ Report of the AIWC, Trivandrum Session, 1935-36, AIWC, New Delhi, p. 34.

The conference in its anxiety to relieve the sufferings of women, to prevent the increasing rate of infant and maternal mortality would leave no problem untouched, however controversial it may be.

The opponents of birth control had two sharp weapons in their hands to subdue its proponents. Women who supported m.b.c.m. were accused of being anti-motherhood and of encouraging immorality, especially among widows and the unmarried.

The second question was simpler to answer. Illicit pregnancies and attempted abortions also involved some men in the crime, and it was easy to describe women as the innocent victims, which they were, in many cases. Use of m.b.c.m., in that case, could save them from the risk of going to a quack.⁴⁴ But the opponents did not buy this argument which, they thought, was trying to prevent illicit pregnancies while encouraging illicit sexual relations. From Anindita Devi's report on the AIWC Calcutta Conference, we note that some women opposing birth control argued that if control of birth was needed, why were widows allowed to remarry. She was surprised that these women wanted to force pregnancies on the weak and sick mothers tired of repeated childbirths, while depriving healthy widows of the happiness of motherhood.

With regard to the first question, great care was taken to prove that the supporters of m.b.c.m. were not against motherhood. Voices of women supporting m.b.c.m. on the grounds of reproductive right and freedom of choice were soft tuned. After the resolution on birth control was passed in the Trivandrum Conference of AIWC (1935-36), Renuka Roy clarified the position of the AIWC in the *Modern Review*. According to her, AIWC was no feminist organisation aggressively reiterating its rights. It did not want to start a bitter and demeaning sex war in India. Neither did it believe in total birth control as some people deliberately misunderstood. It only believed in birth spacing and certain birth restrictions in cases where conditions of health or poverty made it incumbent.⁴⁵ Similarly Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya also clarified that birth control was not to prevent childbirth but to regulate it scientifically. But her voice was not totally devoid of 'right consciousness'. We quote one passage from her writings.⁴⁶

The masculine dominated society always stresses the importance of women as a breeder . . . women freed from the penalty of undesired motherhood will deal in a death blow to man's vested interest.

⁴⁴ Mrs A. Mathews, 'Birth Control and Child Mortality', *Stree Dharma*, October 1933, pp. 613-15. Anundita Devi's and Jyotirmoyee Devi's articles also mention this aspect.

⁴⁵ Renuka Roy, 'Impressions of the Tenth Session of the All India Women's Conference' *Modern Review*, February 1936, pp. 209-12

⁴⁶ Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya et al (eds), *The Awakening of Indian Women*, Madras. 1939, p 33.

Kamala Devi's socialist background in politics probably had a correlation with her being more vocal on women's reproductive rights. The women's periodical in Bengali, *Jayasree* argued in favour of m.b.c.m. in a definite language of 'right' consciousness. Leelabati Roy (Nag), who was the founder of *Jayasree*, was an active member of the Praja Socialist Party (PSP). Women writing in *Jayasree* strongly supported widow remarriage, inheritance right over father's property, and even the right to divorce, if it was absolutely necessary.

But it would be mistaken to believe that these women, who claimed various rights, declined traditional gender roles. On the contrary, a conscious effort was there to clarify the position in support of the traditional gender role if such an accusation was made. For instance, Sudhamoyee Devi supported m.b.c.m. because she felt this would help women practice more intensive mothering and would also give them more time to entertain their husbands so that their men would not seek pleasure outside.⁷⁷

Stree Dharma, the official organ of WIA, quoted the following lines from the writings of Margaret Sanger:

Woman must have her freedom, the fundamental freedom of *choosing whether or not* she shall be a mother, and how many children she will have. Regardless of what men's attitude may be. . . . (emphasis mine).⁷⁸

Rukmini Arundale wrote, in *Stree Dharma*, that the sole duty of women was not to please husbands. Women and children should not suffer any more under the one-sided rule of men.⁷⁹ Simultaneously, *Stree Dharma* published the news on the World League of Motherhood. The journal also published articles about the glory of Indian motherhood written by authors like Swami Jagadiswarananda.⁸⁰

The nationalist movement played a crucial role in reviving the glory of Indian motherhood and popularising it through the image of 'Bharatmata', and the song of devotion 'Bande Mataram'. In such an environment, to denounce motherhood would have been, politically, near-suicidal. Besides, given the traditional socialisation process, there is no reason why the mainstream women's organisations and periodicals would take such a fatal approach. The clarification by Renuka Roy is, therefore, self-explanatory.

Consciousness regarding women's rights was still in a nascent state in the women's movement in India during that period. Given this, the writings on

⁷⁷ Sudhamoyee Devi, 'Janmo-Sason', *Jayasree*, Agrabayan, 1339 B.S., pp. 667-71.

⁷⁸ Margaret Sanger, Extract from the 'New Motherhood', *Stree Dharma*, March 1926, p. 71.

⁷⁹ Rukmini Arundale, 'Women's Duty', *Stree Dharma*, March 1926, p. 103-4.

⁸⁰ Swami Jagadiswarananda, 'Ideals of Indian Motherhood', *Stree Dharma*, August 1933, pp. 481-85, and September 1933, pp. 542-45.

women's reproductive rights within the birth control movement should be considered a bold voice. The focus on women's reproductive health in this debate, which has a welfare characteristic, is also self-explanatory.

What I have attempted in this article is an exploration of the major trends of the debate. More intensive investigation, as well as reading of the contemporary writings in other Indian languages, is needed for a better understanding of the history of birth control in India.

Short-run variation in vital events in Kerala: The role of economic factors

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Introduction

The discipline of historical demography has received little attention in India, while it had been a major area of research in the West, and attracted a large number of researchers. The studies on Indian historical demography mainly confined themselves to investigations of the course of the demographic transition, using census records or vital registration data for the analysis of the impact of certain unique famine or scarcity periods on the population.¹ However, the effect of a short-term variation in the economic variables (which includes the non-famine years too) on vital events has received very little attention from the researchers.²

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¹ Tim Dyson (ed.), *India's Historical Demography: Studies in Famine, Disease and Society*, London, 1989; Ronald Lardinois, 'Famines, Epidemics and Mortality in South India—A Reappraisal of the Demographic Crisis of 1876–1878', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 20(11), 16 March 1985. Leela Visaria and Pravin Visaria, 'Population: 1751–1947', in Dharma Kumar (ed.), *The Cambridge Economic History of India, Vol. II*, Cambridge, 1982.

² An analysis of the impact of short-run variation in vital events in Bombay Presidency has been undertaken by P.R. Galloway and Ronald D. Lee, 'Some Possibilities of the Analysis of Aggregate Historical Demographic Data from China', Berkeley, 1985 (unpublished).

Although, in the long run, several socio-religious and cultural variables explain the movement of demographic variables (demographic transition), short-run movements in demographic events are primarily attributable to changes in the standard of living. In other words, fluctuations in vital events from one year to the next could essentially be due to fluctuations in economic levels of living.³ Hence the analysis of the fluctuation in vital events in the short run provides details on the past population and their standard of living, with better accuracy and precision than the usual descriptive historical method of investigation.⁴

Studies have shown that fluctuations in certain economic variables ultimately lead to economic crises and create unexpected demographic events.⁵ For example, an increase in the prices of foodgrains in a particular year might be the result of a deficit in the food supply. During such periods,

not only that the real wages of the labourers will go down but even the small and marginal cultivators are likely to be forced into the market place as buyers of food grain (at famine price) rather than as sellers of surplus produce.⁶

³ P.R. Galloway, 'Basic Patterns and Annual Variations in Fertility, Nuptiality, Mortality and Prices in Pre-industrial Europe', *Population Studies*, Vol. 42(3), 1988, pp. 275-303; *idem*, 'Secular Changes in the Short-term: Preventive, Positive and Temperature Checks to Population growth in Europe, 1460-1909', Berkeley 1992 (unpublished).

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Tommy Bengtsson et al. (eds), *Pre-Industrial Population Change: The Mortality Decline and Short-term Population Movements*, Stockholm, 1984; P.R. Galloway, 'Differentials in Demographic Response to Annual Price Variations in Pre-revolutionary France. A Comparison of Rich and Poor Areas of Rouen, 1681 to 1787', *European Journal of Population*, Vol. 2 (2), 1986, pp. 269-305; *idem*, 'Basic Patterns'; *idem*, 'Secular Changes'; *idem* 'Short-run Population Dynamics Among the Rich and Poor in European Countries, Rural Jutland and Urban Rouen', in David Reher and R.S. Schofield (eds), *Old and New Methods in Historical Demography*, Oxford, 1993; Ulla Larsen, 'Determinants of Short-term Fluctuations in Nuptiality in Sweden, 1751-1913: Application of Multivariate ARIMA Model', *European Journal of Population* (3), 1987, pp. 202-32; Ronald D. Lee, 'Models of Pre-industrial Population Dynamics, with Applications to England', in C. Tilly (ed.), *Historical Studies in Changing Fertility*, Princeton, 1978; *idem*, 'Short-term Variation: Vital Rates, Prices, and Weather', in E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield (eds), *The Population History of England, 1541-1871: A Reconstruction*, Cambridge, 1981; *idem*, 'The Demographic Response to Economic Crises in Historical and Contemporary Populations', *Population Bulletin of Unites Nations*, Vol. 29(1), 1990, pp. 1-15; Toni Richards, 'Weather, Nutrition, and the Economy: Short-run Fluctuations in Births, Deaths and Marriages, France 1740-1909', *Demography*, Vol. 20(2), 1983, pp. 197-212; M. Silver, 'Births, Marriages and Business Cycles in the United States', *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 123(3), 1965, pp. 237-256; Z. Eckstein et al., 'Short-Run Fluctuations in Fertility and Mortality in Pre-industrial Sweden', *European Economic Review*, Vol. 26(3), 1984, pp. 295-317.

⁶ Galloway, 'Basic Patterns'.

Births are likely to be voluntarily postponed or automatically reduced during such times, for several reasons.⁷ The adverse effect of such periods on deaths and marriages are evident from different studies.⁸

However, it may be noted that the principal impediment in the analysis of the short-term variation is the lack of reliable annual series of data on both vital events and economic variables. On the other hand, with the adequacy of dependable data on vital events as well as economic variables of the past, the western countries have greatly enriched their knowledge of the past population, society and economy. One of the critical data source accessible for the analysis of short-term variation in vital events in the West has been the parish records. In Kerala, with a larger percentage of Christian population (nearly 20 per cent of the total population) compared to all-India level, and with a fairly good collection of parish records, these sources have been little used.

This article therefore, mainly focuses on the short-term impact of the fluctuations in the economic variables on vital events among two Catholic groups in Kerala. The main effort will be to understand the direction and magnitude of fluctuation in the demographic series of births, deaths and marriages on account of the oscillation in the economic variables in these two Catholic groups separately.

This article is divided into different sections. An overview of studies on short-run variation in vital events and economic variables, mainly in the western countries, constitutes the second section. A short description of the study population is provided in the third section. The fourth section discusses the source of data for the present study and the tools of analysis. The results of the analysis are provided in the fifth section, and finally, the conclusions of the study are given in the last section (section six).

The Short-term Variation in Demographic Events: A Review

Studies on short-term fluctuations in different countries, employing distinct methodologies, have shown that economic factors like grain prices, harvests, etc., have a profound influence on the demographic variables such as birth, death and marriage. Fluctuations in these economic variables are often cited as a good proxy for measuring the annual variation in the standard of living.

One of the leading studies of the interlinkages between economic and demographic variables in the past, in the short-run, has been carried out using English parish records.⁹ Using a distributed lag model which measures

⁷ Lee, 'The Demographic Response to Economic Crisis'.

⁸ Larsen, 'Determinants of Short-term Fluctuations'.

⁹ Lee, 'Short-term variation in vital rates, prices and weather'.

the magnitude of change in the demographic variables through an oscillation in the economic factor, this study noted a profound influence of wheat prices on marriages and marital fertility between 1548–1834. However, the relationship between wheat prices and mortality was observed to be rather weak during the same period.

The distributed lag model has been extensively utilised in short-run analysis. It is noted that fertility was highly sensitive to grain price fluctuation with similar magnitude and timing across all pre-industrial European countries.¹⁰ On the other hand, the magnitude and timing of response of mortality to variation in grain prices were considerably different, based on the level of industrialisation, income levels and urbanisation.

Another study, in some of the rich and poor European countries (1756–1870), rich and poor districts in a rural portion of Jutland (Arhus Diocese) in Denmark (1721–1801), and in rich and poor parishes in the city of Rouen in France (1681–1744), by using the same methodology, showed that poor areas experience a significantly stronger preventive check than the rich areas in rural Arhus Diocese and Rouen, while across countries there is little difference between rich and poor nations.¹¹ The positive check, however, is always strong among the poor.

Studies in four European countries—England, France (1670–1909), Prussia (1700–1909) and Sweden (1740–1909)—observed a substantial change in the short-term preventive check and positive check, over a period of time. The preventive check diminishes marginally in England, Prussia and Sweden, and declines dramatically in France. The positive check decreases to near-zero in England and Prussia while it remains strong in France and Sweden.¹² Temperature also had an effect on the vital events, fertility and mortality, and temperature–mortality overwhelmed the temperature–fertility check in all areas.

In France, between 1740–1909, the initial effect of a harvest failure on fertility was higher than the effect in the years following the crisis, suggesting anticipation of harvest failure and quick restriction of fertility, than a purely nutritional effect.¹³ However, the effect of weather on fertility was very weak. The largest effect of a high price on mortality was found two years after a poor harvest. The impact of weather on mortality was also with a lag, indicating the influence of weather on morbidity than mortality.

Studies carried out in Sweden, using spectral analysis, found that the relationship between economic fluctuations and short-term demographic changes varies in different stages of demographic transition.¹⁴ The study

¹⁰ Galloway, 'Basic Patterns'.

¹¹ Galloway, 'Short-term Population Dynamics'.

¹² Galloway, 'Short-term Preventive, Positive and Temperature Checks'.

¹³ Richards, 'Weather, Nutrition and Economy'.

¹⁴ R. Ohlsson and Tommy Bengtsson, 'Population and Economic fluctuation in Sweden 1749–1914', in Tommy Bengtsson et al. (eds), *Pre-Industrial Population Change*

observed a clear significant relationship between real wages and demographic variables in the first two stages (1749–1799 and 1800–1869) of demographic transition. However, during the third stage (1869–1914), the relationship was not very consistent.

Another study has been carried out on the determinants of short-term fluctuations in nuptiality in Sweden, between 1751–1913, through a multi-variate Auto Regressive Moving Average model.¹⁵ This study suggested that a relative change in the price of rye had a negative effect on relative changes in the marriage rate in the index year and for a one-year time lag, and a smaller positive effect for a two- and a three-year time lag.

A study in different regions of Sweden noticed the relationship between price and mortality to be significantly different in different time periods.¹⁶ Between 1751–1770, a significant positive regression coefficient emerges for the current year price and Crude Death Rate (CDR) in five of the six countries. On the other hand, between 1774–1802, the regression coefficient show considerably lower, and sometimes negative, values in the same countries.

The experience of European population before the twentieth century is highly consistent with the experience of the poor third world countries in this century such as Bangladesh and China.¹⁷ A comparison of short-term fluctuations in Asian regions such as Bombay Presidency in India (1876–1930), Taiwan (1906–1940) and Japan (1875–1940) with Europe indicated a striking similarity in the fluctuations with European pattern for both fertility and mortality.¹⁸

The examination of short-term fluctuations in the analysis of historical demography is a growing area of research particularly for the last two decades. Lot of studies on short-term fluctuations in vital rates in relation to economic variables exist from different countries. These studies provide a major hint towards the past population and their standard of living, with greater accuracy and precision.

The Study Population

Kerala Christians have a history similar to that of the Christian religion. The tradition of Syrian Christians in Kerala goes back to the beginning of the Christian era when, it is believed that St Thomas, one of the disciples of Jesus Christ came to the south-west coast of India and converted many people, including upper caste people, to this religion.¹⁹ This group, generally

¹⁵ Larsen, 'Determinants of Short-term Fluctuations'.

¹⁶ Gunnar Fridlitzus and Rolf Ohlsson, 'Mortality Pattern in Sweden 1751–1802: A Regional Analysis', in Tommy Bengtsson et al. (eds), *Pre-Industrial Population Change*.

¹⁷ Lee, 'The Demographic Response to Economic Crisis'.

¹⁸ Galloway and Lee, 'Some possibilities' of the analysis of aggregate historical demographic data from China'

¹⁹ C.P. Mathew and M.M. Thomas, *The Indian Churches of St. Thomas*, Delhi, 1967.

known as Syrian Christians, enjoyed a higher status in society due to its superior lineage. Later, starting from the sixteenth century, there had been an inflow of missionaries to Kerala. Among them were missionaries like St Francis Xavier, who laboured in the coastal areas of the state and converted many oppressed groups to Christianity. Latin Catholics are the converts by the efforts of missionaries in the last couple of centuries. The western missionaries also tried to bring the old Syrian Christians under the Church of Rome; those who came under the Church of Rome are known as Syrian Catholics.

Information on the economic conditions of these two Catholic groups, separately, is hard to get. However, some information is available in the 1931 census with regard to Syrian Christians. Economically, Syrian Christians (mainly) constitute of marginal farmers and wage labourers. Among the total earners of this community, nearly 15.6 per cent were agricultural labourers and 25.3 per cent were cultivators. The cultivators were mainly marginal farmers. The land distribution data available from the 1931 census showed that 49.6 per cent of the wetland owners and 31.6 per cent of dryland owners had less than one acre of land. Owners with more than 10 acres of the wet and dry land were 4.1 and 6.8 per cent respectively, amongst the Syrian Christians' community.²⁰

Latin Catholics are believed to be comparatively poorer than Syrian Catholic groups. They are mainly converted from socio-economically backward sections of society. An analysis of the field-level data available for six selected parishes of this study from Trivandrum archdiocese revealed that the larger number of workers among them were engaged in agricultural and allied activities, including fishing, around 1992. Further, except in one parish, around 50 per cent of the houses were made of temporary materials like palm leaves and grass, etc.²¹

Sources of Data and Method of Analysis

The annual data on demographic variables such as birth, death and marriage is collected from nearly five parishes of the Syrian Catholic church in and around Palai, Kottayam and six parishes of Latin Catholics in and around Trivandrum. The selected parishes of Latin Catholics, however, mainly belong to coastal areas.

To represent economic trends, three variables, price of paddy, coconut, and the wage rate of agricultural labourers, are chosen. The parishes of the Syrian Catholic church usually maintain a record of daily accounts from very early periods. Many of these parishes own land, and its produce has

²⁰ *Census of India, Travancore, Part I*, Trivandrum, 1931.

²¹ S. Irudaya Rajan, P.N. Mari Bhat and Tim Dyson, 'Mortality and Fertility Transition in Kerala: A Historical Investigation Based on Parish Records', Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum (unpublished), 1993.

been sold in the market. The price of that produce is recorded in the daily account-books of the parish. Further, the daily wages paid to the employees working in the agricultural field are also recorded on a daily basis. The information on prices and wages is collected from these sources. This data is thought to be more reliable and accurate compared to other data sources.

Paddy and coconut are, obviously, two important agricultural products of the state of Kerala.²² Paddy was mainly staple food for the people of Kerala. Furthermore, the state had been a net importer of paddy starting from 1867.²³ Consequently, the domestic price of paddy was largely determined by the world market scenario. An abnormal increase in the price of paddy, therefore, would definitely have an adverse impact on the people at large, in the state.

Coconut, though, forms a part of the food basket of Kerala to some extent, is generally considered a commercial crop which provides some earnings to the marginal farmers of the state. Therefore, any rise in the price of coconut leads to a corresponding increase in the standard of living of the people of the state and a decline in its price will have a negative impact on the living standard.

The wage rate of agricultural labourers is also considered since it is noticed that a significant proportion of earners among the Syrian Catholics and Latin Catholics are agricultural labourers. Therefore, an increase in the wage rate would enhance the standard of living of the workers.

The first step involved in the analysis of short-run fluctuation is to eliminate the long-term trend in both the economic and demographic variables. This has been done by dividing each point by a centred nine-year moving average.²⁴ It is understood that such a method effectively removes the longer fluctuation of more than 15 to 20 years' duration, associated with changes in size and age structure of the population.²⁵ Another major advantage of such a procedure is that the mean of the resulting detrended series is nearly unity and hence its coefficient in statistical analysis will be equivalent to elasticity.²⁶

For prices, this detrending removes most of the influence of secular inflation and secular real income change, leaving behind variance closely related to changes in real income.²⁷

²² P.G.K. Panikar et al., 'Population Growth and Agricultural Development: A Case Study of Kerala', Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum, 1977 (unpublished).

²³ T.K. Velu Pillai, *Travancore State Manual Part III*, Trivandrum, 1940.

²⁴ Galloway, 'Basic Patterns', p. 282. Lee, 'Short-term variation in vital rates, price and weather', p. 358.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Galloway, 'Basic Patterns', p. 282.

²⁷ Lee, 'Short-term variation in vital rates, prices and weather', p. 357.

The econometric method utilised for the analysis of short-term variations in vital events in relation to economic variables is the distributed lag model. Accordingly, the dependent variable is regressed with the values of the current as well as some past years' observation of the independent variables while identifying the impact of explanatory variables of the past on the contemporary dependent variable. In other words, the distributed lag model has an advantage towards understanding the effect of a crisis year not only on the contemporary dependent variables but also on the subsequent years. It is also assumed that the relationship between dependant and independent variables is linear. Ordinary least square method is utilised for estimating the coefficient.

Cochrane and Orcutt's iterative procedure is utilised for the correction of second-order autoregressive disturbances.²⁹ The estimates of corrected R-squares are also given in the results.

The number of lag years has been restricted to two years, as against four years commonly adopted in different studies.³⁰ The analysis carried out with four years of lag brought out several inconsistent results after a lag of two years. It is felt, therefore, that a lag value of more than two years is meaningless in the case of Travancore, where the impact of the crisis period on the people was minimal and weak.

Interrelationship between Variables

Impact of Economic Variable on Births

The effect of fluctuations on births on account of variations in economic factors is often grouped in two categories, namely, biological and behavioural. Biological factors may include increased malnutrition due to crisis, and consequent reduction in fertility of the women. An increase in age at menarche, a reduction in the age of menopause, increase in spontaneous abortion, anovulation and amenorrhoea are the main biological effects on fertility.³¹ There is also the possibility of the voluntary control of birth during the difficult periods through increased abstinence, spousal separation and psychic stress which may lead to amenorrhea or reduce coitus, and postponement of marriage, leading to the reduction in the number of births.³¹ Though it will be difficult to clearly distinguish the biological and behavioural factors leading to the reduction in fertility, the overlapping, evidence from several studies indicates a clear existence of reduction in fertility during economic crisis periods.

²⁹ R.S. Pindyck and D.L. Rubinfeld, *Econometric Models and Economic Forecasts*, Tokyo, 1976

³⁰ Lee, 'Short-term variation in vital rates, price and weather'; Galloway, 'Basic Patterns'.

³¹ Galloway, 'Basic Patterns', p. 283.

³¹ *Ibid.*; Lee, 'The demographic response to economic crisis'.

Table 1 gives the coefficient of price of paddy, coconut and wage rate on births estimated separately for each variable for Syrian and Latin Catholics.

Table 1
The Estimated Coefficient of Price of Paddy, Coconut and Wage Rate on Births among Syrian and Latin Catholics

Lag Years	Price of Paddy		Price of coconut		Wage rate	
	Syrian 1909-76	Latin 1920-76	Syrian 1909-76	Latin 1920-76	Syrian 1928-76	Latin 1927-76
0	-0.085**	-0.017	0.063*	0.235*	0.124**	0.147
1	0.002	0.003	-0.030	0.073	0.022	0.020
2	-0.007	0.234*	0.047	0.181	0.095**	0.140
Lag Sum	-0.090	0.220	0.080	0.489	0.241	0.307
Constant	1.090**	0.774**	0.923**	0.520	0.771**	0.699**
R ²	0.07	0.08	0.07	0.12	0.21	0.06
Corr. R ²	0.07	0.05	0.05	0.13	0.22	0.07
DW	2.18	1.37	2.04	1.33	2.23	1.54
F	1.48	1.38	1.49	2.36	3.79	0.97

Note: * at 0.10 level; ** Significant at 0.05 level.

It is observed from Table 1 that the price of paddy has a significant negative impact and the price of coconut and wage rate have a significant positive impact on birth at lag zero among Syrian Catholics. The wage rate also shows a significant influence on births at lag two in this population. All these relationships are in the expected direction. Although it would appear that a rise in price of paddy would have much more adverse effect among Latin Catholics as they were comparatively poorer than Syrian Catholics, it is noted that a rise in the price of paddy is, in fact, associated with a rise in births in this group. The price of coconut, as expected, has a significant positive impact on this group at lag zero. Surprisingly, wage rate does not show any significant impact on births.

It should be recalled that the estimated coefficients are elasticities due to the method of detrending procedure adopted earlier. The wage rate seems to have the foremost influence on fertility among the Syrian Catholics, the sum of all lag being 0.241. It means that a doubling of wage rate would lead to nearly 24 per cent increase in the fertility and vice versa. The total variation explained by wage rate is nearly 21 per cent, which is higher than other variables. The price of paddy and coconut, on the other hand, does not have any noticeable effect on fertility. The lag sum in both the cases was nearly 0.09, indicating that a 100 per cent change in the price of these commodities would account for a mere 9 per cent change in the births. The R-square is only 7 per cent. The lag sum for coconut among Latin Catholics is as high as 49 per cent, which is much higher than that estimated for Syrian

Catholics (9 per cent). The lag sum of wage rate is also higher than observed in the Syrian Catholic population (31 per cent). However, the total variation explained by these variables is much lower than that observed among Syrian Catholics. The magnitude of the lag coefficient in this population is even higher than that observed in many European countries. In England the wheat prices had recorded a lag sum of -0.144 for the period 1548-1834 (Lee 1981: 370). However, the total lag effect in Taiwan during 1918-1938 was only -0.073 while that of Bombay Presidency (1887-1925) was to the tune of -0.292 .³² The corrected R-square was less than 20 in both Taiwan and Bombay Presidency.³³ The experience of pre-industrial European countries show that R-square generally falls below 40 in most of the countries.³⁴

The timing of response of fertility to economic variables in the study population is not similar to that experienced in other countries. Due to the time lag existing between conception and birth, insignificant relation is commonly noticed between these variables at zero lag, and a profound impact at lags one and two. This has been true in the case of Japan, Taiwan, Bombay and European countries where analyses of similar type have been carried out.³⁵ However, this study shows a significant relationship between fertility and economic variable at lag zero irrespective of the kind of economic variable being considered. In the case of England, wheat prices have a profound impact on fertility even at lag zero.³⁶ This probably indicates that it is foetal loss during the periods of crisis that reduces the fertility rather than deliberate postponement. In other words, biological factors dominate over behavioural forces during the period of crisis among both these populations.

It is interesting to note that the price of paddy shows a positive relationship on birth among Latin Catholics even with an assumed lower economic standard of living than Syrian Catholics. Does this mean that Latin Catholics are comparatively better-off in economic well-being than Syrian Catholics? This argument, however, is hard to accept. The main reason may be that as the data for Latin Catholics is mainly drawn from the coastal areas, the majority of them may belong to the fishing community. Therefore, any increase in the general price level would mean more money for them from the fish market, which would enhance the standard of living. Therefore, the variables selected for Latin Catholics do not seem to be sufficient to

³² Galloway and Lee, 'Some possibilities of the analysis of aggregate historical demographic data from China'.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Galloway, 'Basic Patterns'.

³⁵ Galloway and Lee, 'Some possibilities of the analysis of aggregate historical demographic data from China'; Richards, 'Weather, Nutrition and Economy'.

³⁶ Lee, 'Short-term variation in vital rates, price and weather'

measure their standard of living. Other variables such as the price of fish, or the amount of rainfall in each season, may be better indicators for them.

The impact of economic variables on fertility occupies prominence only in a natural fertility environment. In a society where the couples practise party-specific fertility regulation, the effect of crisis on fertility will be minimal.²⁷ Therefore, it is necessary to subdivide the entire period into two, namely pre-transition and transition. Furthermore, different studies observed that the magnitude of fluctuation in vital rates will be varied in different stages of demographic transition.²⁸ In the latter stages of the transition, a weak, or rather, the absence of any relationship is noticed between economic variables and fertility in the short run. The onset of fertility decline in Kerala is traced back to the early 1950s.²⁹ Therefore, the entire period is being divided into two; before 1950, and after 1950.

Table 2 gives the estimated lag coefficient for the pre-transitional period for all the three economic variables under consideration.

During the pre-transitional period, the results exhibit a strong relationship between economic variables and fertility, particularly with regard to

Table 2
The Estimated Coefficient of Prices of Paddy, Coconut and Wage Rate on Birth among Syrian and Latin Catholics in the Pre-transitional Period

Lag Years	Price of paddy		Price of coconut		Wage rate	
	Syrian 1909-50	Latin 1920-50	Syrian 1909-50	Latin 1920-50	Syrian 1928-50	Latin 1927-50
0	-0.145*	0.035	0.052	0.218	0.134*	0.107
1	-0.030	-0.412	-0.050	0.103	0.006	0.016
2	-0.002	0.685*	0.044	0.239	0.096	0.145
Lag Sum	-0.177	0.308	0.046	0.560	0.236	0.268
Constant	1.169**	0.686*	0.950**	0.455*	0.772**	0.268
R ²	0.11	0.14	0.06	0.15	0.23	0.748**
Corr. R ²	0.12	0.07	0.04	0.15	0.24	0.09
DW	2.36	1.36	2.10	1.27	2.20	1.40
F	1.46	1.41	0.81	1.49	1.67	0.32

Note: * at 0.10 level; ** Significant at 0.05 level.

²⁷ Galloway and Lee, 'Some possibilities of the analysis of aggregate historical demographic data from China'.

²⁸ R. Ohlsson and Tommy Bengtsson, 'Population and Economic fluctuation in Sweden 1749-1914', in Tommy Bengtsson et al. (eds), *Pre-industrial Population Change*; R. Ohlsson and Tommy Bengtsson, 'Population and Economic fluctuation in Sweden 1749-1914', in Tommy Bengtsson et al. (eds), *Pre-industrial Population Change*.

²⁹ P.R.G. Nair, 'Decline of Birth Rate in Kerala: A hypothesis about the interrelationship between demographic variables, health services and education', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 9, pp. 323-36.

the price of paddy, among Syrian Catholics. The lag sum of the price of paddy has increased to -0.17 from a nadir of -0.9 when all periods are considered together. On the other hand, the lag sum of wage rate and price of coconut remained almost similar to that of all periods although elasticity had registered a marginal decline with the price of coconut. The total variation explained by price of paddy and wage rate, however, went up in the pre-transitional period. None of the economic variables show any significant impact on birth among the Latin Catholic population, except a positive relationship between price of paddy and birth at lag two. All economic variables show a positive relationship. This may be a confirmation of the above argument that a general increase in the price of commodities would, in fact, help this population through increased return from fish marketing.

According to Table 3, which represents the coefficient for the second period (transitional period), there is definitely a weakening of relationship between economic variables and fertility among Syrian Catholics. The

Table 3
The Estimated Coefficient of Price of Paddy, Coconut and Wage Rate on Birth among Syrian and Latin Catholics in the Transitional Period

Lag Years	Price of paddy		Price of coconut		Wage rate	
	Syrian 1951-76	Latin 1951-76	Syrian 1951-76	Latin 1951-76	Syrian 1951-76	Latin 1951-76
0	-0.043	0.031	0.149*	0.370*	0.056	0.371**
1	0.038	0.044	0.034	0.224	0.057	0.149
2	-0.018	0.134*	0.074	0.089	0.026	0.305*
Lag Sum	-0.023	0.209	0.257	0.683	0.139	0.825
Constant	1.028**	0.794**	0.756**	0.348	0.870**	0.201
R ²	0.12	0.16	0.19	0.21	0.06	0.32
Corr R ²	0.10	0.18	0.16	0.24	0.05	0.39
DW	2.11	2.10	2.16	2.39	2.33	2.27
F	0.88	1.31	1.57	1.77	0.41	3.13

Note: * Significant at 0.10 level; ** Significant at 0.05 level.

price of coconut, however, maintained its impact on the births. Among the Latin Catholics, on the other hand, the price of coconut and wage rate became significant in the second period although they were insignificant in the first period. The lag sum and R-square have considerably increased. It is, however, difficult to confirm from the existing data whether this shift is an indication of the diminishing dependence of this population on fishing and a gradual shift towards wage-earning jobs and commercial crop cultivation.

Economic Variables and Marriage

The economic base needed for a ceremony like marriage is well accepted and established in different studies. Therefore, most studies on short-term variation have observed a significant relationship between the number of marriages and economic standard of living. In pre-industrial Europe, a man could not marry without the means to support a family at a conventional standard of living.²⁰ In a society like Kerala, where the conduct of marriage itself is considerably expensive due to the prevalence of dowry and other expenses related to the ceremony, it will be impossible for marriages to occur during periods of scarcity and hardship.

Table 4 gives the estimated elasticity of economic variables on marriage among Syrian and Latin Catholics. Price of paddy has recorded a positive relationship with marriage, indicating an increase in marriage with a hike in the price of the paddy. This is surprising, since paddy is the staple food and an abnormal increase in the price of this commodity would

Table 4
The Estimated Coefficient of Price of Paddy, Coconut and Wage Rate on Marriage among Syrian and Latin Catholics

Lag Years	Price of paddy		Price of coconut		Wage rate	
	Syrian 1934-76	Latin 1939-76	Syrian 1934-76	Latin 1939-76	Syrian 1939-76	Latin 1939-76
0	0.128*	0.017	0.174**	0.053	0.120	0.077
1	0.001	0.129	-0.023	0.135	-0.070	0.004
2	0.101	0.120	-0.006	-0.211*	-0.069	-0.060
Lag Sum	0.230	0.266	0.145	-0.023	-0.019	0.021
Constant	0.773**	0.734**	0.859**	1.02**	1.008**	0.975**
R ²	0.11	0.16	0.09	0.10	0.08	0.02
Corr. R ²	0.11	0.11	0.10	0.09	0.10	0.01
DW	1.41	1.67	1.42	1.75	1.48	1.62
F	1.83	2.29	1.58	1.36	1.26	0.20

Note: * Significant at 0.10 level; ** Significant at 0.05 level.

normally bring misery to the people. On the other hand, even with regard to its relationship with fertility, the influence is marginal, indicating that the price of paddy does not seem to be a good indicator to measure the standard of living of the population of Travancore. However, the price of

²⁰ Lee, 'Pre-industrial population dynamics', H.J. Habakkuk, 'English population in the eighteenth century', in D.V. Glass and D.E.C. Eversely (eds), *Population in History: Essays in Historical Demography*, London, 1965; J. Hajnal, 'European Marriage Pattern in Perspective', in D.V. Glass and D.E.C. Eversely (eds), *Population in History*.

coconut has a significant relationship with marriage at lag zero, indicating a marriage boom when the price of this commercial crop is high and vice-versa. The lag sum of coconut is nearly 0.15. The relationship between wage rate and marriage is not significant, although it is in the expected direction at lag zero. Among the Latin Catholics, all the economic variables show a positive relationship with marriage at lag zero, but it is not statistically significant. In other lag periods, the relationship is mostly negative. As a higher number of marriages take place in the same year of a good period, the subsequent years will register a smaller number of marriages because of the reduction in the population of marriageable age. That may be the cause for a negative association between marriage and economic variables at lags one and two.

Economic Variables and Mortality

The relationship between mortality and economic factors such as wage rate and grain prices remains a matter of debate, particularly in historical context.⁴¹ Generally, it is considered that high grain prices lead to increased mortality due to starvation deaths during these periods. In addition, scarcity would create malnourishment, making people susceptible and vulnerable to various diseases, leading to a higher number of deaths in the future.⁴² However, it is also possible that in a period of crisis or scarcity the fertility will be lower than normal, and, as a result, the number of infant deaths is heavily reduced, leading to an overall reduction in the mortality rate. There are also instances where high wage rate even leads to high mortality. For example, it is observed that high wages usually occur during a plague epidemic, during which mortality will also be high.⁴³

Table 5 gives the effect of economic variables on death rate among Syrian Catholics and Latin Catholics. Price of paddy does not show any significant relationship with deaths. On the other hand, the price of coconut influences death in the first lag, and wage rate at second lag significantly among Syrian Catholics. None of these variables, however, is significant among Latin Catholics.

However, at zero lag there has been no impact of economic variables on mortality. This indicates that death by starvation during periods of scarcity was absent in the case of the Syrian Catholic population. However, these scarcity periods created a high level of morbidity among the population, which would affect their chances of survival in the future. The lag sum is observed to be very high in the case of wage rate (-0.345) among Syrian Catholics.

⁴¹ Lee, 'Models of Pre-Industrial population dynamics'; *idem*, 'Short-term variation in vital rates, price and weather'.

⁴² Galloway, 'Basic Patterns'.

⁴³ Lee, 'Models of Pre-Industrial population dynamics'.

Table 5
The Estimated Coefficient of Price of Paddy, Coconut and Wage Rate on Birth among Syrian and Latin Catholics

Lag Years	Price of paddy		Price of coconut		Wage rate	
	Syrian 1934-76	Latin 1939-76	Syrian 1934-76	Latin 1939-76	Syrian 1939-76	Latin 1939-76
0	0.012	-0.045	-0.006	-0.190	-0.050	-0.020
1	0.074	0.040	-0.168*	0.158	-0.128	0.047
2	0.069	0.066	-0.041	-0.163	-0.167*	-0.169
Lag Sum	0.155	0.061	-0.215	-0.195	-0.345	-0.142
Constant	0.844**	0.941**	1.203**	1.187**	1.324**	1.136**
R ²	0.07	0.03	0.12	0.09	0.15	0.04
Corr. R ²	0.06	0.02	0.09	0.14	0.14	0.06
DW	1.26	1.77	1.35	1.72	1.29	1.93
F	0.93	0.30	1.71	1.01	2.19	0.42

Note: * Significant at 0.10 level; ** Significant at 0.05 level.

Summary

In the analysis of historical demography, short-run fluctuations in demographic variables in relation to economic factors have received increasing attention for the last two decades. Such an examination permits an understanding of the past population, economy and society with much more precision and accuracy than has been carried out painstakingly with descriptive historical method of analysis. This article mainly attempts to understand the past population in relation to economy, with the available data on annual series of vital events from the parishes of Syrian and Latin Catholic population in Kerala. Syrian Catholics, as compared to Latin Catholics, are assumed to be in a better living standard. Therefore, it is hypothesised that fluctuations in economic variables would have a severe impact among Latin Catholics than Syrian Catholics.

Among the economic variables, the agricultural wage rate seems to have the highest impact on fertility among Syrian Catholics, with a high positive lag coefficient. Price of paddy and coconut is also observed to have the expected direction of relationship, particularly in the first lag, indicating that foetal loss during periods of crisis reduces fertility, than a deliberate or voluntary postponement of births. The price of coconut and the wage rate also show a significant influence on death, except at lag zero, indicating the absence of starvation deaths in this population. However, the scarcity period has created a high morbidity situation which will affect the chances of survival in the future. On the other hand, the influence of these economic variables on marriage is mainly confined to lag zero.

On the other hand, an increase in price level does seem to have a favourable effect on birth and marriage among Latin Catholic population.

Unlike among Syrian Catholics, a rise in the price of paddy increases the number of births at lag two. This, in any case, cannot be interpreted as an indication of better living standard among Latin Catholics compared to Syrian Catholics. As the data for Latin Catholics are mainly drawn from coastal parishes, the main occupation of the population would have been fishing. Therefore, a general increase in the price level as indicated by increase in the price of paddy, might fetch more money and an improvement in the standard of living by way of selling fish. The economic variables considered here may not be totally representative for Latin Catholics in that case.

Understanding pre-transitional fertility in colonial Malabar

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Kerala's impressive demographic record, despite its low per capita income and industrial output, has attracted considerable academic attention. The Kerala case was yet another instance where the assumption of the classic transition theory based on the modernisation paradigm proved inadequate. The inadequacy of the transition 'theory' after it failed to stand up to the empirical findings of the large-scale European Fertility Project encouraged social demographers to highlight alternative routes to fertility and mortality reduction in poor countries.¹ Kerala's demographic achievements have often been compared with those of other poor countries such as China, Sri Lanka and Costa Rica. While the Chinese life expectancy of sixty-nine years is much higher than the Indian figure of around sixty years, Kerala's life expectation of seventy-two years is even higher than the Chinese one. Similarly, though China has done much better than India in terms of infant mortality and literacy, Kerala's achievements in these areas have outstripped Chinese levels.² High female literacy, a government committed to welfare, the matrilineal system and the state's settlement patterns have been offered as explanations for Kerala's marked improvements in mortality and falling fertility. Unfortunately, while much effort has gone into explaining modern Kerala's unique demographic achievements, these exercises have either

Acknowledgements: I am most grateful to Sumit Guha for his comments on this paper. The usual disclaimers apply.

¹ John C. Caldwell, 'Routes to low mortality in poor countries', *Population and Development Review*, 12(2), 1986.

² John Drèze and Amartya Sen, *India: Economic Development and Social Opportunity*, Delhi, 1995, p. 3.

denied the significance of a historical perspective or, at best, have made only cursory attempts to look at the past demographic regime, based on limited data and questionable techniques. Whenever demographers have managed to overcome their obsession with cross-sectional surveys and have supplemented these with time series data (not comparison of point estimates), contextualising them historically, the rewards have indeed been significant. It is surprising that a phenomenon such as demographic transition is sought to be explained with scant attention to history. In a recent paper Tim Dyson, using long-run birth and death series, has been able to push back the data of Kerala's fertility decline to the 1950s.³

This article tries to correct this problem by exploring the historical antecedents of present-day Kerala's low fertility. It does so by raising two questions—first, what was the level of fertility in colonial Malabar, and second, what were the demographic and non-demographic factors responsible for the observed level of fertility. Apart from discovering the specifics of colonial Malabar's demographic regime, this article hopes to highlight the existence of a variety of pre-transitional demographic regimes in India. Based on data for the erstwhile Malabar district, which constituted the three northern divisions of modern Kerala state, it attempts to utilise the infrequently used but much maligned vital registration figures in conjunction with standard census information. Section I reviews selected literature on the trends in fertility in pre-transitional societies. It also looks at some of the theories put forward for modern Kerala's rapid demographic transition. Section II discusses the database of the present study. Section III attempts to construct time series for fertility and mortality from corrected vital registration data. Demographic and social explanations are offered for the observed fertility trends in Section IV.

Review of Literature on Pre-transitional Fertility Levels and Changes

In earlier works on demography, the East was characterised by very high levels of fertility in contrast to the West.⁴ Recent research on Japanese, Indian and Chinese historical demography has begun to question this

³ Tim Dyson, 'Birth rate trends in India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Pakistan: A long, comparative view', Paper presented at the IUSSP Seminar on Comparative Perspectives on the Fertility Transition in South Asia, Islamabad, December 1996.

⁴ See T.R. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population and a Summary View of the Principle of Population*, edited by Antony Flew, Middlesex, 1979, pp. 28–29; A.J. Coale, 'The Decline of Fertility in Europe from the French Revolution to World War II', in S. Behrman, et al. (eds), *Fertility and Family Planning. A World View*, Ann Arbor, 1964; Nigel Crook, 'On the Comparative Historical Perspective: India, Europe, The Far East', in Tim Dyson (ed.), *India's Historical Demography*, London, 1989.

view.⁵ Given the limited number and scope of these studies it would not be prudent to conclude that they have proved high Asian fertility to be a myth. What they do indicate is the presence of a range of pre-transitional fertility regimes in Asian history.

In the case of India too, the bulk of demographic studies has subscribed to the old thesis. Kingsley Davis' pioneering work on the Indian censuses strongly supported it. Davis reached a crude birth rate estimate of around 48 for India in the early twentieth century, by back projecting the age group 0-9 in the census using child mortality rates from actuarial tables.⁶ Other researchers have used model stable and quasi-stable populations to estimate demographic measures based on census age distributions. The use of model stable populations necessitates acceptance of the age-specific mortality pattern in a given model life-table. Recently, more sophisticated demographic techniques have been employed to try and overcome some of these biases.⁷ However, the extreme inaccuracies of Indian age-reporting severely restrict its use for historical demographic exercises.

While not denying the significance of census data or census-based exercises, this article argues for complementing it with registration data.⁸ Vital registration data permits the construction of annual, and sometimes monthly, time series of vital rates, which can then be studied with economic and other non-demographic indices. Further, registration data provides detailed direct figures on age- and cause-specific mortality. This significant source for Indian historical demography, however, remains largely untapped. While it cannot be said that those who argue that vital registration data is unreliable are entirely wrong, only the very rash would reject them wholesale. The relative inaccessibility of this source (vis-à-vis the census) appears to be a major reason for its under-utilisation.

⁵ See S.B. Hanley and K. Yamamura, *Economic and Demographic Change in Pre-Industrial Japan*, Princeton, 1977; G.W. Barclay et al., 'A Reassessment of the Demography of Traditional Rural China', *Population Index*, 41, 1976.

⁶ The age-specific death rates in these life tables are severely limited by their generalization of the mortality experience of 'Proclaimed clans' in Uttar Pradesh for males and the selection of sex ratio of females from south and south-eastern India. Further, it depends heavily on the age distribution, 0-9, which is of doubtful veracity. The census age distributions were also plagued by the actuarial practice of smoothing, especially for the 1931 census.

⁷ See Mari Bhat, 'Mortality and Fertility in India, 1881-1961, A Reassessment'; and Alice W. Clarke, 'Mortality, Fertility and the Status of Women in India, 1881-1931', in Tim Dyson (ed.), *India's Historical Demography*. Both these works employ the 'variable r' technique developed by Preston.

⁸ Vital registration data has been profitably used in a number of recent works on historical demography. See Tim Dyson, 'The Historical Demography of Berar, 1881-1980'; Deborah Guz, 'Population Dynamics of Famine in Nineteenth Century Punjab, 1896-97 and 1899-1900'; Ian D. Mills, 'Influenza in India during 1918-19', all essays in Dyson (ed.), *India's Historical Demography*; Shiela Zurbrigg, 'Hunger and Epidemic Malaria in Punjab, 1868-1940', *Economic and Political Weekly* (hereafter EPW), 27(4), 25 January 1992.

Coming to Kerala, we find an acute paucity of studies on the colonial demographic history of this demographically most advanced Indian state. With modern Kerala achieving a marked lowering of fertility as early as the 1960s, a number of explanations, often contradictory, have been advanced to explain this phenomenon.⁹

While attempting to explain demographic transition, these works are characterised by a refusal to rigorously investigate the antecedents of this demographic trend. When it comes to discussing the pre-1947 period, Kerala is taken to be synonymous with Travancore-Cochin, omitting Malabar. For this period, in spite of the well-known risks in using later census data, no attempt is made to make use of direct registration figures. Finally, while a host of explanations ranging from equitable distribution of income to government policy and literacy are advanced as explanations for the state's fertility decline, there is no attempt to examine the dynamics of the region's earlier demographic regime. This appears surprising when we see that demographic literature pertaining to Europe has taken the study of past demographic regimes very seriously in the context of understanding later developments more fully.

One work which does take some note of historical data in discussing post-independence fertility and mortality trends is the Census monograph on Kerala's fertility and mortality trends.¹⁰ After applying an arbitrarily estimated correction factor of 0.55 for under-registration, the study argues that the fertility level of Kerala has remained high and unchanging between 1931 and 1960. The lack of decline in the Child-Woman Ratio (CWR), absence of fertility differentials among the population and the offsetting of the high proportion of 'never married' by the low proportion of widows, and the estimated fertility indices lead the study to conclude that 'the crude birth rate of Kerala's population remained above 45 per 1,000 population prior to 1941. . . .'¹¹ The first problem with the study is its homogenising of an arbitrarily chosen past. Second, vital registration figures have been ignored without examination. Third, in spite of evidence to the contrary,

⁹ See P.R.G. Nair, 'Decline in birth rate in Kerala: A hypothesis about the interrelationship between demographic variables, health services and education', *EPW*, 1974; T.N. Krishnan, 'Demographic Transition in Kerala: Facts and Factors', *EPW*, Special Number, Vol 11(31, 32 and 33), August 1976; J.P. Mencher, 'The Lessons and Non-Lessons of Kerala: Agricultural Labourers and Poverty', *EPW*, Special Number, 15 (41, 42 and 43), October 1980; A.M. Basu, 'Birth Control by Asbestos Workers in Kerala: The Possibility of a Poverty Induced Population Transition', *Development and Change*, 17(2), 1976; 'The Changing Population of Kerala', Census of India, 1961, Monograph Series No. 7, Office of the Registrar General, New Delhi; K. Mahadevan and M. Sumangala, *Social Development, Cultural Change and Fertility Decline: A Study of Fertility Change in Kerala*, New Delhi, 1987; P.N. Mari Bhat and S. Irudaya Rajan, 'Demographic Transition in Kerala Revisited', *EPW*, 25(35-36), 1-8 September 1990.

¹⁰ 'The Changing Population of Kerala', Census of India 1961, Monograph Series Number 7.

¹¹ 'The Changing Population of Kerala', p. 43.

too much emphasis has been laid on time point comparisons (the results of fertility surveys in 1931 and 1961) to argue that fertility registered an increase rather than a decrease.¹²

Other articles on Kerala's demography have mainly focused on the onset of the demographic transition using Sample Registration System (SRS) data. References to antecedent demographic behaviour are, at best, incidental. However, the causal relationships highlighted in these works for declining birth rates in post-independence Kerala can be tested for the earlier period. For instance, Krishnan suggests that 'the most important factors that explain the inter-district variations in birth rate in Kerala are nuptiality and crude death rates'.¹³ Some of these studies also suggest Kerala's difference from the all-India pattern and its closeness to the European nuptiality regime.¹⁴

The present article is not an attempt to join the debate on the data of onset of the demographic transition. The attempt is to use some of the explanations advanced for it, to investigate the past demographic regime and look for historical influences, if any.

Data Base and its Limitations

The main sources for reconstructing colonial Malabar's demographic history are the decadal censuses and the annual Report of the Sanitary Commissioner of Madras (RSCM). For the early nineteenth century we have only pre-census population counts supplying information on the total population size and its sex-wise, religion-wise and caste-wise distribution. Fortunately, for the most part of the census era, we have independently collected vital rates for the population in the Reports of the Sanitary Commissioner for each district of the Madras Presidency, beginning in 1867. The RSCM recorded vital statistics, cause of death, grain prices, the nature of the season and health conditions of the population every year. The data furnished in the RSCM was collected by the village headman who was also the Registrar of Births and Deaths. The RSCM's raw data on births and deaths can thus be used for constructing an alternate series to the census figures, after making certain corrections.

With some exceptions, in recent years demographers and others have shied away from using annual vital rates for studying the country's past demographic behaviour. Vital registration statistics in India have been faulted for careless enumeration and under-reporting. In Madras, year after year, with monotonous regularity, the Sanitary Commissioner's Report lamented severe under-reporting—'Registration of vital statistics is

¹² 'The Changing Population of Kerala', p. 56.

¹³ T.N. Krishnan, 'Demographic Transition in Kerala', p. 1219.

¹⁴ Mari Bhat and Irudaya Rajan, 'Demographic Transition in Kerala Revisited', p. 1203; Krishnan, 'Demographic Transition in Kerala', p. 1211.

generally very backward in the rural tracts of the Presidency, due principally to there being no legal compulsion on the part of the residents to report all cases of births and deaths. The innumerable duties attached to the village headmen, who are also the Registrars of Births and Deaths in these areas, and the consequent lack of much interest on their part in the conduct of this part of their work also contribute to the present unsatisfactory results.¹⁵ The Madras vital registration figures have constantly trended lower than those for the rest of the country. In Malabar, and for the Presidency as a whole, however, the crude rate of natural increase (CRNI), i.e., the difference between the births and deaths, corresponded fairly well with the increase in census population size. This correspondence, however, should not be mistaken for good vital registration coverage. Malabar ranked only twentieth among the twenty-five districts of Madras in terms of under-registration of vital events in 1926.¹⁶ The completeness of vital registration coverage was the matter of a controversy between the superintendent of the census operation and the Director of Public Health. The former, in his report on the 1921 Census, maintained that 'it does not appear that the registration of births and deaths in the various districts is badly defective'.¹⁷ By deducting the number of deaths for the less-than-one-year age cohort from the registered number of births in 1920, he found that the remainder approximated closely to the population returned in the 1921 census for the 0-1 age group. This was taken as proof for the completeness of vital registration.

The correspondence of the CRNI with intercensal population increase suggests that while vital registration may not have been complete, the enumerated sample is fairly well representative of the demographic behaviour of the whole population. In the present article, the raw age-specific death registration data has been corrected with age-wise census population figures for under-enumeration using the Brass Growth Balance Method.¹⁸ The advantage with annual and monthly vital registration series is that, unlike the census information, it allows a study of the interrelationship of demographic movements and changes in other short-run variables. However, given the undercoverage of vital statistics and the approximate means of correction, it would be prudent to use them as indicators of a trend rather than accurate absolute values.

¹⁵ RSCM, 1915, p. 27.

¹⁶ See Madras Public Health, *Review of the Public Health Report*, Local Self Government, Madras, n.d.

¹⁷ RSCM, 1923, p. 3.

¹⁸ W Brass, 'Estimating Mortality from Deficient Data', in *Methods for Estimating Fertility and Mortality from Limited and Defective Data*, University of North Carolina, POPLAB Occasional Publication, 1975. See Tim Dyson and Arup Maharatna, 'Excess Mortality During the Great Bengal Famine: A Re-evaluation', *Indian Economic and Social History Review (IESHR)*, xxviii(3), 1991 for its application to pre-independence Indian vital statistics.

The decennial censuses from 1871 onwards provide the main source for the demographic history of India. The Madras Presidency had regular quinquennial population enumerations from 1851–52 till the taking of the first all-India Census of 1871, conducted by the East India Company's Board of Revenue. In Malabar, these quinquennial censuses were preceded by population enumerations in 1821, 1827, and 1837, and rough estimations in 1802 and 1808 (see Table 1).¹⁹ However, more detailed information, especially on age distribution and nuptiality, is available only from 1891. The census information on Malabar is seriously flawed by the absence of age-specific fertility measures. Further, the 1931 census supplied smoothed data on the age distribution of the population, thereby injecting biases. The 1941 census has been omitted because of its not being a complete enumeration. Use has also been made of fertility surveys for Travancore–Cochin to corroborate the assertions made for Malabar. In addition to the above statistical sources, anthropological surveys, census reports and official documents on marriage practices have been drawn upon.

Table 1
Malabar Census Statistics

Year	PTOT	SR	ROG(%)
1827	10,22,195	1.047	—
1856	16,02,914	974	1.56
1861	17,09,081	994	1.29
1866	18,56,378	994	1.67
1871	22,61,250	1,008	4.02
1881	23,65,035	986	0.45
1891	26,41,928	983	1.11
1901	27,90,281	977	0.55
1911	30,15,099	967	0.77
1921	30,98,871	949	0.27
1931	35,33,944	944	1.32
1941	39,29,425	938	1.07
1951	47,58,342	947	1.93

Sources: *Statistics of Malabar, Census*, Captain B.S. Ward, 'Memoirs, Triangles and Statistics of Malabar, 1828', *Catalogue of the Historical Maps of the Survey of India, 1700–1900*, National Archives of India, New Delhi.

Age Structure, Mortality and Fertility Trends

In this section an attempt is made to chart the movement of mortality and fertility in colonial Malabar using the decennial Census and the annual vital rates statistics from the RSCM. The RSCM provides a rich source for

¹⁹ See Captain B.S. Ward, 'Memoirs, Triangles and Statistics of Malabar, 1828', and 'A Canashoomaree or Statistical Table of the Province of Malabar', *Mss. Catalogue of the Historical Maps of the Survey of India*, National Archives of India, New Delhi.

reconstructing the district's mortality and fertility trends. Annual death data is available from 1866.²⁰

Even a cursory inspection of the annual birth and death data for Malabar suggests gross under-enumeration. However, when the CRNI is calculated from the raw birth and death figures it exhibits only a small degree of under-enumeration (compared to the rate of intercensal increase), amounting to less than 5 per cent, for the period 1871 to 1931. This appears to have been caused by under-registration of both births and deaths. However, the monthly and seasonal movements in mortality and fertility show recursive patterns. Sharp increases in mortality figures are also registered in years of major epidemics and subsistence crises. All this points to the conclusion that though mortality and fertility figures are low in absolute terms, they did sensitively mirror short-term fluctuations. The changing levels of under-registration over time, however, prevents the use of this data in its raw form for constructing time series of mortality and fertility-based measures for periods exceeding a decade. A marked improvement in the level of registration is claimed by the 1920s. Such changes in coverage render the uncorrected series unsuitable for medium- and long-run analysis.

Mortality

The Brass Growth Balance Method has been employed here to estimate the level of death registration around each census year from 1881, when age-specific population figures were made available for the first time in the Indian census.

Table 2 gives the estimated correction factors and the level of completeness of registration. The assumption being made here is that the average of the correction factors for two census years will provide a deficient but working revision factor for that intercensal period. Though this method is not the most robust, its simplicity, and the fact that the present analysis is not attempting to accurately chart the changes in annual mortality and fertility, justifies its use.²¹

The reciprocal of the slope of the regression of the partial death rate on the partial birth rate provides the level of completeness of registration.

For the period 1871 to 1930, the crude rate of natural increase on the whole exhibited an upward trend. Figures 1(a) and 1(b) show the movement in the corrected and uncorrected crude birth and death rates. A small decrease in the birth and death rates can be noticed after the 1877 famine, up to the 1890s. From the 1890s to 1919 both these rates climb steeply, to decline subsequently. Mortality improves substantially in the post-1921

²⁰ The gaps in the different series constructed on the basis of RSCM data are due to the unavailability of the complete RSCM series in India.

²¹ See United Nations, *Manual X, Indirect Techniques for Demographic Estimation*, New York, 1983, pp. 139-46 for details on the use of the Brass Growth Balance Method.

Table 2
Estimated Levels of Death Under Registration Using the Brass Growth Balances Method

Year	Sex	Slope (K)	Completeness of registration (C)%
1881	Male	4.914	20.40
	Female	3.196	31.28
1891	Male	1.466	68.24
	Female	1.471	68.00
1901	Male	1.395	70.70
	Female	1.328	75.30
1911	Male	1.885	53.04
	Female	2.164	42.21
1921	Male	1.305	76.61
	Female	1.485	67.35
1931	Male	1.187	84.75
	Female	1.485	67.35

Source: See *Manual X*, pp. 139-46. Calculated from data in census and RSCM.

period, increasing the gap between the Crude Death Rate and the Crude Birth Rate. The beginning of the sustained fall in mortality and the consequent rapid population growth in Malabar can be placed around 1912 if we decide to exclude the mortality peaks caused by the influenza epidemic of 1918 and the dysentery and cholera epidemic of 1919. The infant death rate curve also exhibits a sustained downward trend from this period (see Figure: 2 Infant Death Rate).

In Malabar, unlike the rest of the subcontinent, though mortality played a crucial role in limiting population growth, it was fertility rather than mortality which explained the rate of population growth and population size. The following regressions run on the dependent variables 'rate of natural increase' (RNI) and the estimated annual population (ESTPT) with independent variables MAC.B.R.3 and MAC.D.R.3, these being three-year moving averages of the crude birth and death rates respectively. The results of the regressions are shown in Table 3.

The R-squared (R^2) value of the equation is small as other factors such as migration, which have been omitted, may have influenced the rate of increase. However, given the statistical significance of the birth parameter estimate, and the fact that the equation is not being used for forecasting but for explanation, we can take it to suggest the cruciality of birth rates vis-à-vis mortality in population change.²² In 1876 and 1878, Madras experienced a major famine although the intensity of its impact varied geographically. Malabar, which was classed as a 'non-famine district'

²² See A. Koutsoyannis, *Theory of Econometrics*, London, 1985, p. 97 for a note on the importance of statistical tests of significance.

Figure 1a
Uncorrected Crude Birth and Death Rates

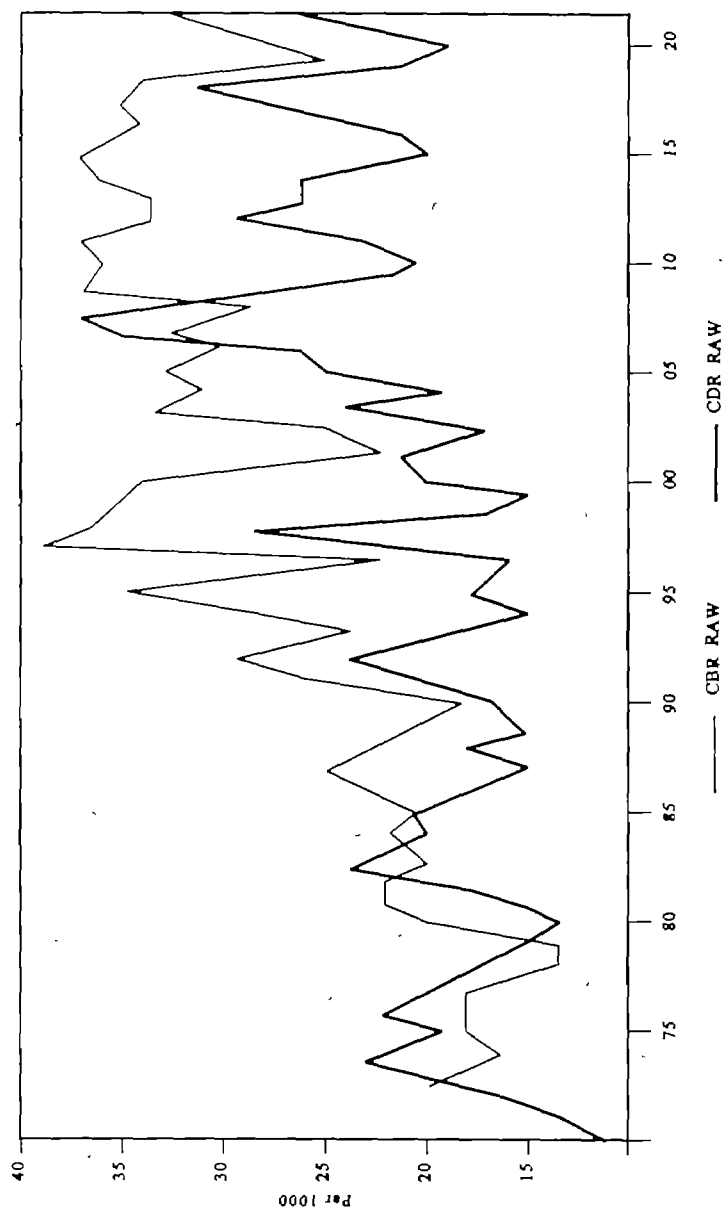


Figure 1b
Corrected Crude Birth and Death Rates

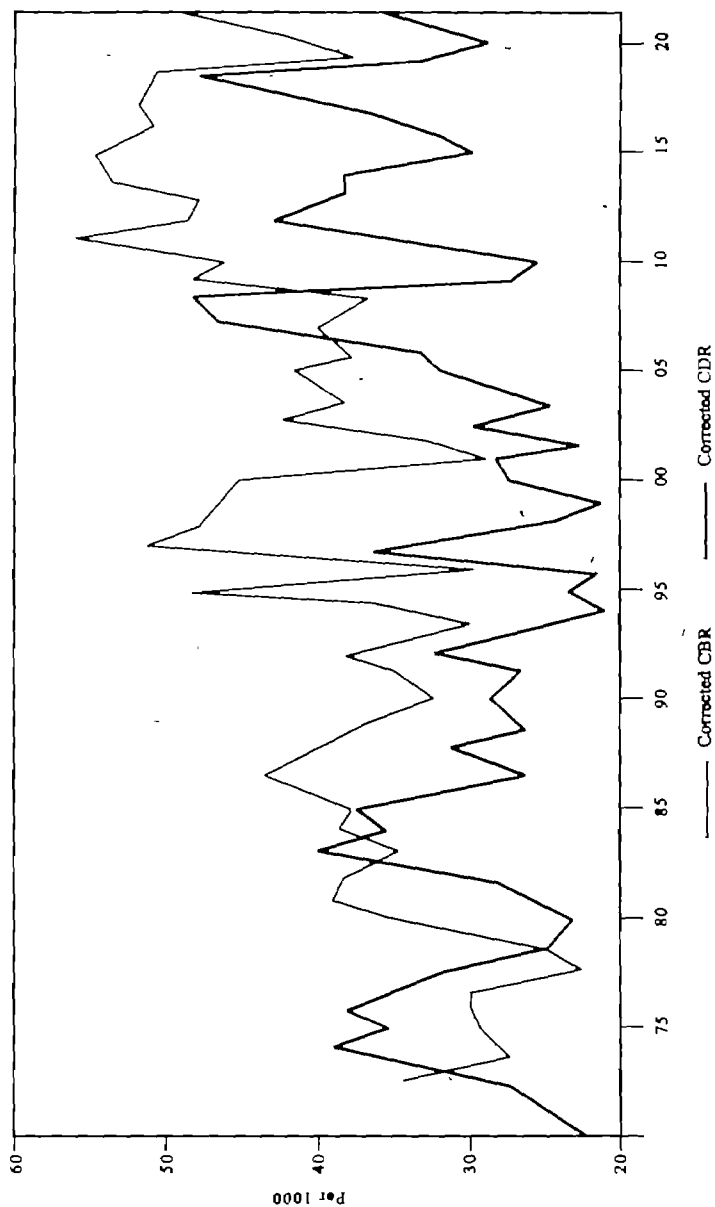


Figure 2
Uncorrected Infant Death Rate (Malabar)

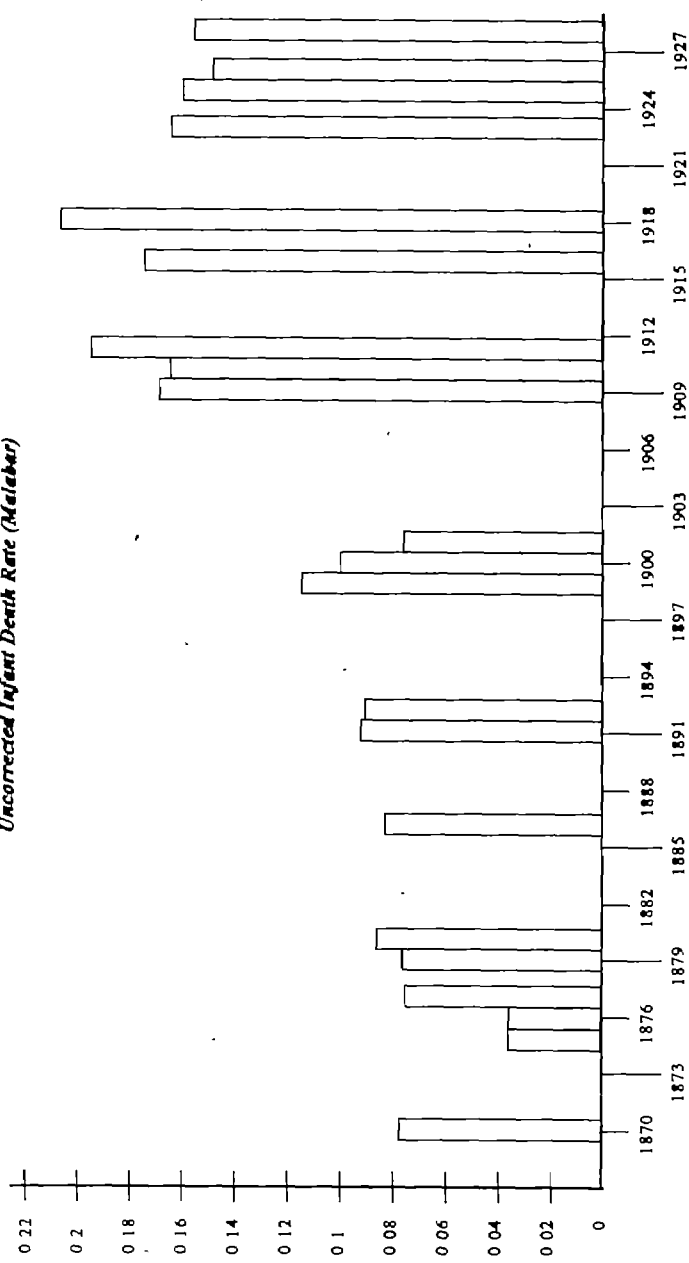


Table 3
Least Squares Regression

Variable	Coefficient	t-Statistic
MAC.B.R.3	0.0480309	1.699*
MAC.D.R.3	-0.007623	-0.02361
Constant	-0.749	-0.7573

Note: Range: 1874 to 1930; Dependent variable: RNI n = 28
R² = 0.11346 *Significant at t_{0.10}

suffered during these years not so much due to pluviometric decreases or crop failures but due to the changed market conditions in the Presidency. In normal years, when a crop failed, prices would rise and rice would come in from Bengal and Burma. But with a famine in the rest of the Presidency, grain was available for import to this chronically rice-deficit district only at famine prices. The market, it may be said, thus conducted the subsistence crisis in the other parts of the Presidency to Malabar, though in the course of transmission much of the deadly intensity of the famine was fortunately lost. In Malabar, the most important cause of death was 'fevers'. It was during the wet, unhealthy monsoon months, which were also a period of reduced agricultural employment and high food prices, that fever mortality was at its peak.

Lack of continuous vital rates between 1882 and 1889 prevent a description of the demographic trends in these years. The available crude death rate of 1885 approaches the earlier 'famine rate' of mortality.

The unrevised Crude Death Rate for 1885 was 16 while the rates corrected for intercensal population increase and for death undercoverage were 21.18 and 32.44 respectively (computed on the basis of RSCM, 1885, and Census of India, Madras, 1881 and 1891).

The official year 1890-91 again saw a scarcity situation. There was a failure of the coffee crop in Wynad and the *makaram* rice crop in the plains, a repetition of what happened in 1876.²³ In response to a shortfall in supply, prices rose and, in 1892, the Crude Death Rate climbed to 18. Another noticeable increase in mortality, in 1900, appears to be the result of a partial scarcity in 1899, coupled with fevers and cholera.²⁴ The first decade of this century saw a sharp rise in mortality rates with the death rate being higher in five out of ten years in Malabar compared to the Presidency. The increase in deaths in 1903 and 1907 was caused by cholera.²⁵ In the first decade of this century the death rate exhibits a statistically insignificant trend against time. The great divide in India's population history is dated at 1921, with the rate of natural increase registering a secular

²³ C. A. Innes, *Malabar*, edited by F.B. Evans, Madras, 1951, p. 273.

²⁴ RSCM, 1897, p. 35.

²⁵ RSCM, 1903, 1907.

increase after this date because of a lowered death rate. If the 1918 influenza epidemic and the associated sharp rise in excess deaths are ignored, one sees a diverging trend between the birth and death rates from 1912. In Malabar even deadlier than the influenza epidemic of 1918 was the severe cholera and dysentery which hit the district the following year.²⁸

Violent fluctuations in the death rate are indicative of an unstable demographic regime vulnerable to external shocks in the forms of epidemics, famines or famine-like situations. The coefficient of variation which measures the fluctuations in the crude death rate series is given in Table 4.

Table 4
Crude Death Rate (CDR) Coefficient of Variation (%)

Years	CDR
1872-80	33.0
1881-90	29.4
1891-1900	34.6
1901-10	35.5
1911-20	36.9
1921-30	14.5

Source: Based on RSCM, Innes, *Malabar*, Vol. 2, Table VI, and *Madras Public Health Annual Report*

Note: (C V = S.D/Mean $\times$ 100).

During periods of excess mortality, working adults and the old, rather than children, bore the brunt of the increase in mortality. In fact, child mortality actually declined during crisis years because of reduced births. This is borne out by the data given in Table 5 on age-specific mortality in crisis and non-crisis years.

This appears to have dampened the tendency of the population to rise steeply after crisis years. The lower child mortality observed during famines and epidemics is largely explained by the huge drop in births during such times. Further, fertility is closely correlated inversely with mortality when not lagged, and directly when lagged, by a year. Mortality, with its associated hardships seems to have pushed down fertility. Years of extreme mortality with the concomitant increase in disease and dearth could also tend to lead to the postponement of new marriages, physical separation of husband and wife and sterility due to malnutrition. Replacement of a dead

²⁸ '... the fever epidemic died down in the early months of 1919, but reappeared about the middle of the next year when, however, its ravages were neither so widespread or fatal as in the previous year. In spite of high prices which still continued everywhere, there was a slight recovery in 1919 except in the West Coast division where a severe visitation of cholera and dysentery sent the death-rate up even higher than it had been in 1918.' *Census of India, Madras, 1921*, Vol. XIII, Part I, *Madras, 1922*, p. 12.

Table 5
Age Pattern of Crisis and Non-crisis Mortality

1919 Crisis Year CBR 33.0			1924 Non-crisis Year CBR 39.0	
Age group	Deaths	Percentage	Deaths	Percentage
0-4	10,333	31.2	7,125	42.4
5-14	2,748	9.9	995	8.6
15-49	5,382	36.1	2,416	25.4
50+	10,243	22.8	7,257	23.5
Total	1,24,928	100.0	77,685	100.0

Source: RSCM, 1919, 1924.

neonate may not be possible immediately because of biological factors such as post-partum amenorrhea, secondary sterility, and so on. These factors thus tend to increase the gap between a rise in deaths and a subsequent increase in births.

Age Composition

The age distribution of the Malabar population changed very little between 1891 and 1931. The population was not very young when compared to many developing countries. It is known that the age composition of closed population is determined largely by mortality, and more importantly, by fertility. The relatively small percentage of the youngest age class is a preliminary pointer to moderate fertility levels. The proportion of this age group also exhibits a long-run decline from 1891 and 1931 (Table 6).

Fertility

The registration of births suffered even greater neglect than deaths at the hands of the enumerators. Birth registration started later than death registration in 1871. The Malabar birth rate has been corrected here for (i) underestimation of the denominator, i.e., total population, and (ii) for undercoverage. The crude birth rates (CBRs), published in the RSCM do not adjust for changes in population between two censuses. This leads to an artificial rise in the crude rates which have a tendency to increase progressively between the beginning and end of a census decade. To adjust for this bias, the crude rates have been calculated on the basis of the estimated population. The number of deaths have been scaled up by a correction factor for under-registration. The births were then increased using the revised death statistics. The crude birth rate though a direct measure of population change caused by fertility, is a very rough index with a number of shortcomings. In calculating the CBR every enumerated

Table 6
Summary Age-Sex Composition

Age	1891		1901		1911		1921		1931		Average
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
0-14	40.1	38.0	40.4	37.9	39.4	37.0	38.8	36.2	33.9	37.7	37.9
15-44	46.5	47.7	46.0	47.6	47.0	48.4	46.5	48.9	54.0	46.7	47.9
45+	13.4	14.3	13.6	14.4	13.6	14.6	14.7	14.9	12.2	15.6	14.1

Source: Computed from *Census of India* (various issues).

birth in a year is taken as an event and is added to the total population. This leads to a simultaneous increase in both the numerator and the denominator, and therefore tends to conceal changes in fertility. Further, the Crude Birth Rate uses the entire population as the denominator whereas this should ideally be the population of women in the reproductive age groups. In spite of these limitations, the Crude Birth Rate has been used here largely because of the unavailability of better annual fertility data. The decennial averages of the corrected and uncorrected Crude Birth Rate computed from registration data are shown in Table 7.

Table 7
Average Actual and Estimated Birth Rate

Years	CBR raw	CBR revised
1881-90	21.80	33.42
1891-00	30.46	33.38
1901-10	30.53	42.25
1911-20	33.11	46.03
1921-30	37.86	

Source: RSCM.

Note: CBR Raw, CBR Revised denote figures corrected for change in denominator and birth rate revised by Brass Growth Balance Method respectively.

The figures in Table 7 suggest moderate fertility. Fertility levels can also be estimated from the age-sex and nuptiality distribution given in the census. Limitations of data allow us only to estimate indirect measures such as the child-woman ratio (CWR) directly from the census figures. The CWR trend largely corresponds with the census age distribution of the proportion of population below age five. The CWR figures for Malabar given in Table 8 are much lower than those of 770 estimated for the 'rest of India' for 1931 by Davis.²⁷ Unfortunately, neither the census nor the RSCM provide any data on age-specific fertility which can help in explaining this fertility differential. However, such a survey was conducted in neighbouring Travancore in 1931 and 1941. Figure 3 shows the age-specific fertility curve between 1931 and 1951.²⁸

²⁷ 'The 'rest of India' necessarily includes, as well as rural areas, all those cities and towns not specifically treated in the urban sections. Figures for it are obtained by subtraction' Kingsley Davis, *The Population of India and Pakistan*, Princeton, 1951; p. 71.

²⁸ Data taken from *Census of India*, Monograph Series, No. 7, p. 51. The 1951 figures are for Travancore-Cochin.

Table 8
Malabar Child-Woman Ratio (CWR)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Children 0-5 years</i>	<i>Females 15-44 years</i>	<i>CWR</i>
1891	375	636	590
1901	400	672	594
1911	419	662	633 ^a
1921	419	781	536
1931	528	849	622
1951	639	1171	545

Source: Census, Madras (various issues).

Note: The radix is 1,000.^a Includes females between 14-40 years

Explaining Moderate Fertility

The peak in the curve for ages 20-24 to 30-34 years exhibits a loss in convexity during this period suggesting some mechanism of fertility reduction at work. Available information on the district's past demographic practices does not suggest the use of any kind of contraception. Then how does one explain the moderate fertility?

Nuptiality:

A comparison of the CWR for the entire population and marital CWR yielded interesting clues to fertility controlling mechanisms. As mentioned earlier, the Malabar CWR was much lower than the all-India average. However, the marital CWR ratios trend much closer to the all-India average.

The average difference between the marital and total CWRs comes to 42 per cent between 1891 and 1931 (see Figure 4). This unambiguously points to nuptiality as the major proximate determinant of Malabar's moderate fertility. With roughly 15 per cent of the women in the reproductive age groups being returned as 'never married', this meant a significant reduction in the population exposed to the risk of conception. A comparison with all-India estimates reveals that even within the married population Malabar's fertility was lower than the all-India average. The percentage of married females in the 15-44 age group continues to be much less in Kerala than for the country as a whole.²⁹

²⁹ The percentage of married females in the 15-44 age group in India and Kerala in 1981 was 80.48 and 60.65 respectively. *Census of India*, 1981, Part II, Delhi, 1984, p. 36. This data is based on a 5 per cent sample.

Figure 3
Age Specific Fertility Rates (Tranacore)

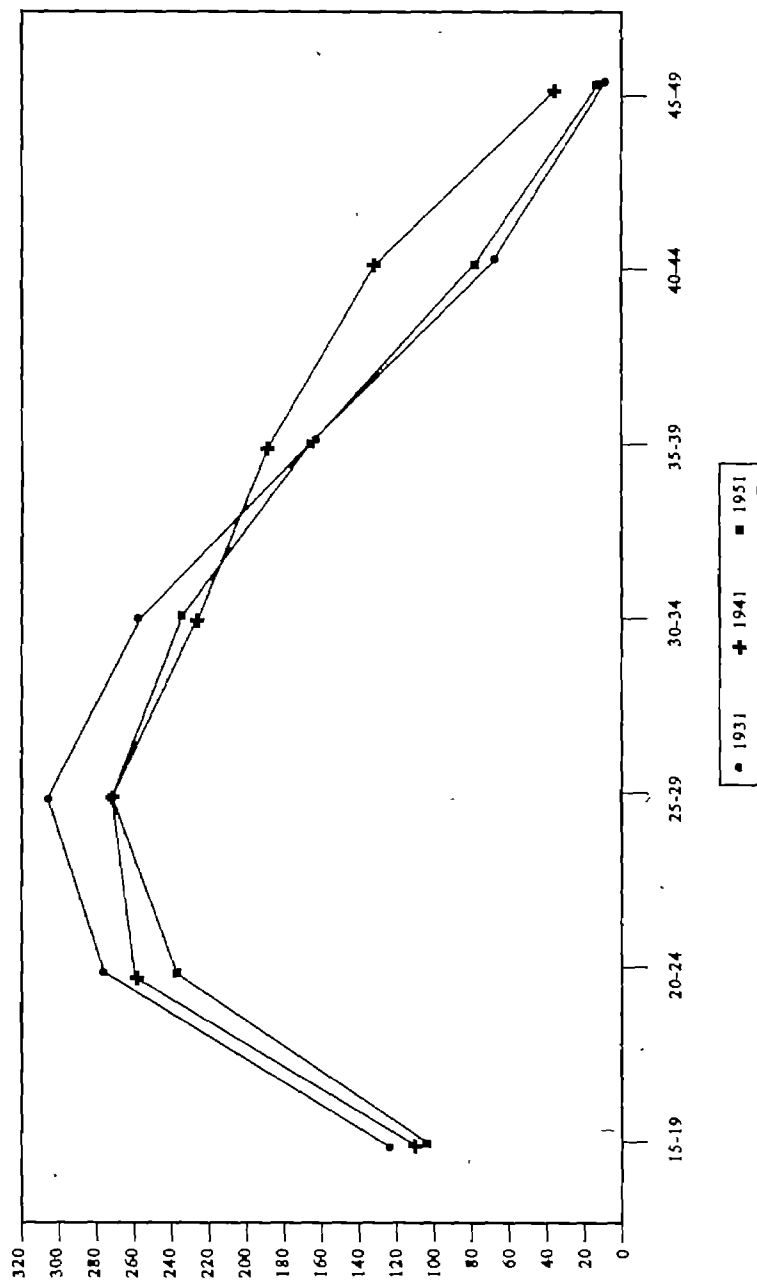
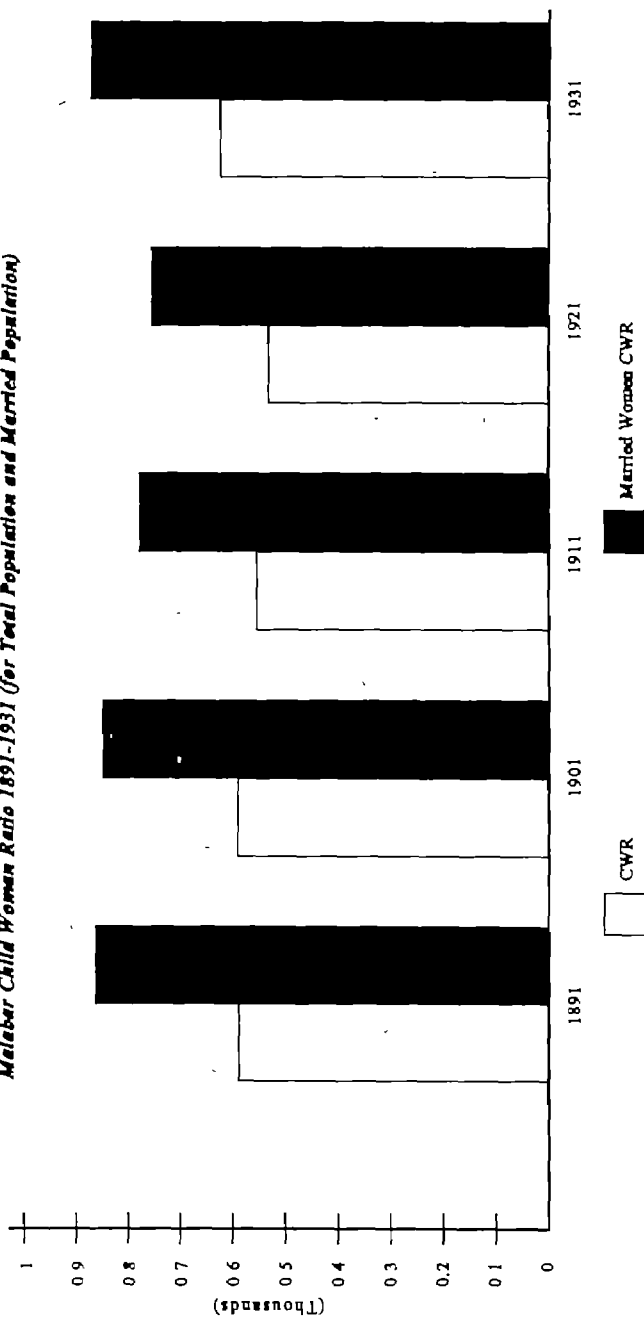


Figure 4
Malabar Child Woman Ratio 1891-1931 (for Total Population and Married Population)



Madras had the highest proportion of single women amongst all the provinces in the country, and within Madras Presidency, Malabar and the West Madras Division registered the highest figures.²⁰

Marital fertility in Malabar, though closer to all-India levels, was still lower than the latter. This may possibly be related to the relatively higher mean age at first marriage, suggested by the age-wise nuptiality data. This would, *ceteris paribus*, not merely postpone higher reproduction rate but slower the rate of population growth by increasing the length of a generation.²¹ These findings support the view that institutional factors rather than contraception was the main mechanism for fertility control in India.²² In Malabar, however, restrictions on marriage rather than prohibitions on widow remarriage was the prime check on fertility.

Unfortunately, nuptiality data is not available annually. This compels us to depend solely on census point estimates. Absence of annual nuptiality figures prevents studying it in association with short-term fluctuations in the economy, such as prices and output. However, the fact that such a large proportion of unmarried or 'never married' women was a structural feature of Malabar's nuptiality pattern prompts one to look to explanations of long duration. Malabar fits in well with the south Indian demographic regime characterised by lower child and infant mortality, low fertility and low sex ratios. The smallness of the above indicators has led demographers to characterise it as 'the most "southern" of states in the south'.²³ Here, we argue that nuptial practices constituted the primary proximate determinant of relatively lower fertility in this area.

Differences in demographic behaviour have been sought to be explained by structuralist analysis of kinship systems, agrarian ecology and status of women.²⁴ Arguments based on kinship differences are limited by the inability

²⁰ According to the 1891 Census Report, 'Among females, the highest proportion of wives is found in Vizagapatam and the lowest in Malabar. Of widowers, the lowest proportion is 192 in 10,000 males which is the ratio in Malabar.' *Census of India, Madras, 1891*, Vol. 13, Part I, p. 130.

In 1911 the unmarried percentages of men and women of all ages for India and Madras were 40, 36.4, 53.3 and 37.3 respectively. *Census of India, Madras, 1911*, Vol. 12, Part I, p. 233. 'The percentage of unmarried persons is higher, both among males and females, in the West Madras division which confirms the fact that people marry at a later age in that area, particularly in Malabar than in other parts of the State.' *Census of India, Madras, 1951*, Vol. 3, Part I, p. 180.

²¹ See A.J. Coale and C.T. Tye, 'The Significance of Age-Patterns of Fertility in High Fertility Populations', *Millbank Memorial Fund Quarterly*, 39(4), 1961, pp. 631-46.

²² Leela Visaria and Pravin Visaria, 'Population', in Dharma Kumar (ed.), *Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. 2, Delhi, 1984, p. 511.

²³ Tim Dyson and Mick Moore, 'On Kinship Structure, Female Autonomy, and Demographic Behavior in India', *Population Studies*, 9(1), 1983, p. 42.

²⁴ See Irvati Karve, *Kinship Organisation in India*, Deccan College Monograph Series, Madras, 1953; L. Dumont and D. Pocock, 'Kinship', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 1957; M.P. Moore, 'Cross-Cultural Surveys of Peasant Family Structures: Some comments', *American Anthropologist*, 75(3), 1975, and Tim Dyson and Mick Moore, 'On Kinship Structure'

to explain demographic changes over time. Similarly, the agrarian ecology thesis is flawed by its insensitivity to the cultural variations and class and community differences within economically defined culture zones. This brings us to explanations based on differences in the status of women. This view does not discount the possible significance of varying levels of women's contribution to production in different agricultural systems, but considers patterned variations in descent, post-marital residence and contributions to natal home to be more important.²⁵ These explanations have been used by demographers to explain varying levels of fertility and the status of women. One problem with these explanations is their refusal to historicise. This becomes all the more acute because the explicand is historical change. For instance, kinship patterns may remain nominally unchanged for a long time, but material changes often affect their de facto working which can significantly affect fertility behaviour. The need is to abandon attempts at mere empirical replication of narrowly focused functional studies and emphasise on the changing institutional reality of different historical settings. To understand the level of colonial fertility in Malabar, we will first isolate the probable determinants, and then study how it changed over a period of about half-a-century. In demographic terms, we have argued that the most crucial proximate determinant of fertility for which data is available was nuptiality. Marriage practices are usually influenced by a host of non-demographic factors such as economic considerations, adaptations to ecology, the demands of the dominant production system and culturally defined practices.

Alice Clarke, in an interesting article on north-central Gujarat, has suggested the use of infanticide and the control of reproduction by certain communities to facilitate upward social and economic mobility. Developing Clarke's suggestion further, Sumit Guha argues that 'significant parts of India were characterised by a demographic regime of (unwitting?) fertility control by the upwardly mobile, while poverty and economic stress limited the numbers of the lower classes, resulting in slow overall growth'.²⁶ Guha argues against the classification of areas of fertility control via marriage by ecozone, in favour of crediting 'the socio-political systems that generated status ranking and hypergamous marriages with an independent efficacy of its own'.²⁷ While Guha's hypothesis is immensely helpful in theorising on pre-transitional fertility control mechanisms, his contention that control of fertility through marriage was absent in the agriculturally secure west coast

²⁵ For a similar view see Leela Visaria, 'Regional Variations in Female Autonomy and Fertility and Contraception in India', Gujarat Institute of Development Research, Working Paper Series, No. 50.

²⁶ Sumit Guha, 'The Population History of South Asia from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Centuries: An Exploration', Conference on Asian Population History, Taipei, January 1996, p. 17.

²⁷ Sumit Guha, 'The population history of South Asia'.

is wrong. Malabar, with its well-known marriage codes, is a case in point. Further, as this region was always beyond the pale of Mughal control, it would be difficult to argue that Malabar's marriage-reducing arrangements were in any way influenced by the practices of the expanding Mughal empire.

It is a well-known fact that the proportion of 'never married' was the highest among Christians and the lowest among the Muslims. But Indian Christians did not form a significant part of Malabar's population. This leaves us with the Hindus, who formed about 70 per cent of Malabar's population.²⁴ The Hindus in Malabar included a wide range of sharply demarcated caste groups that varied significantly, both in terms of cultural practices and class. At the very top of the Kerala caste hierarchy stood Nambudiri Brahmins. The high caste patrilineal and patrilocal Nambudiri Brahmins were, traditionally, wealthy non-cultivating landlords. The Nambudiris had exclusivist marriage rules which permitted only the eldest son in a Nambudiri family to marry a Nambudiri woman. Only children born of such couples were recognised as Nambudiris. Children born of *sambandhams* between Nambudiri males and Nayar women were not included in the Nambudiri caste. This greatly increased the proportion of unmarried Nambudiri women who were subjected to celibacy for life.

While the Nambudiris ranked first in the normative caste hierarchy and as landlords in south Malabar, the matrilineal, matrilocal Nairs formed, politically, the most vocal section of the Hindu population. The Nairs, traditionally warriors and rulers in pre-colonial Malabar, were the first to enter the colonial bureaucracy and imbibe western education. The traditional Nair matrilineal household was called the *tharavad*. This property was impartible, and inheritance was down the female line. However, during our period, the *tharavad* was managed by the eldest male member of the family which resulted in a number of tensions in this system. Nair girls were ritually married to a Brahmin before they attained puberty. After this, they were free to enter into sexual relations with one or more Brahmin or Nair males. These relations could also be terminated with ease. Thus, marriage relations did not mean a severance of relations with natal home and kin. A study of matrilineal Ashanti women, who strongly resembled the matrilineal Nayars of Kerala, found the system to be consistent with powerful sanctions for high fertility.²⁵ However, sanction for terminating such unions and female control over sexuality appear to have countered the logic of high fertility built into the Nayar sexual and nuptial code. Further, in north Malabar, the Nayars were largely monogamous. The other two major caste groups were those of Tiyas and Cherumans. The

²⁴ Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Others formed 70.58, 27.58, 1.83 and 0.16 per cent of the total population in 1881 Logan, *Malabar*, Vol. 1, Madras, 1951, p. 178.

²⁵ See Frank Lorimer, *Culture and Human Fertility*, New York, 1979, p. 73.

self-cultivating Tiyas, who were traditionally coconut-growers and toddy-tappers, followed the matrilineal system in north Malabar and the patrilineal system in south Malabar. The untouchable Cherumans were agrestic serfs or landless labourers. This numerically large caste was patrilineal. A common feature of all the non-Brahmin castes was the ease with which marriages and sexual unions could be terminated.

This classification by caste, however, gives a false picture of homogeneous castes. The Nayars or the Tiyas, for example, were characterised by significant internal stratification in terms of occupation and class. The high proportion of unmarried women can be directly linked only to Nambudiri marriage restrictions. The Nambudiris, however, formed less than 3 per cent of the population and could not influence the nuptiality rates for the entire population of the district. The Nayars, on the other hand, could, ritually, never be widowed. The high proportion of unmarried Nayars in the reproductive age groups, going up to more than 80 per cent and more than 20 per cent for males and females respectively in the 17-23 age group (in 1931) appears fantastically high. It may be argued that the census enumerators wrongly returned Nayar women who had *sambandham* as 'unmarried'. This, however, does not appear correct because when we move to older age categories such as 24-44 years, for instance, the proportion of unmarried reduces to roughly 20 and 10 per cent for males and females. The other reason why census nuptiality data should not be rejected is that the high proportions of 'never married' or unmarried were also registered for non-Nayar castes such as the Tiyas and Cherumans, who did not follow practices such as *sambandham* which the colonial mind might have refused to accept as marriage. A look at the age-wise nuptial status reveals a high age of first marriage across castes. The Nayars had the highest age of first marriage, followed by the Nambudiris, Tiyas and Cherumans. The fairly late age of marriage among the servile Cherumans, who came lowest in the ritual and economic hierarchy, does not suggest that education was a major factor in postponing marriages.

The increasing age of first marriage suggested by the nuptiality data seems to be the result of two distinct set of factors. First, neither of the two dominant castes of the area—the Nambudiris and the Nayars—attached great value to an early effective marriage. The practice of compulsory celibacy for most of the Nambudiri women and the ephemeral nature of Nayar *sambandham* seem to have legitimised non-marriage and the idea of easy dissolution of marriages.

Though the lower castes did not follow the Nayar or Nambudiri marriage rules and practices, they also emphasised easy termination of marriages. A historical explanation needs to take account of change. Significant changes came about in the marriage practices of the Nayars. *Sambandhams* were gradually frowned upon by the educated Nayar elite, who saw it as a mechanism and vestige of Nambudiri exploitation. From the late nineteenth century, with an increasing number of Nayar males entering the

colonial bureaucracy, there was a small shift away from the matrilineal residence pattern towards neo-local and virilocal households. Though this did not immediately become a widespread phenomenon, it increasingly came to be looked upon as the most desirable form of family and household. The new ideal Nayar family in the late nineteenth century, depicted in Ravi Varma's portraits, was the small nuclear household.⁴⁰ Census figures for the entire population, however, do not indicate any dramatic decline in household size. In fact, a sharp increase can be seen in 1951 (Table 9). This has been explained in terms of an increase in the birth rate and a decrease in mortality in Malabar. Along with this emigration decreased and there was a return of emigrants on a large scale from Burma, Ceylon and Malaya.⁴¹

Table 9
Change in Household Size

Year	Persons per house	
	Madras	West Madras Division
1891	5.3	5.7
1901	5.3	5.7
1911	5.3	5.6
1921	5.1	5.4
1931	5.1	5.6
1941	5.1	5.6
1951	5.3	6.1 ^a

Sources: *Census of India*, 1931, Madras, v. 14, Part I, p. 51; *Census of India*, 1941, v. 2, Madras, p. 5.

Note: ^a Refers to rural population, *Census of India*, 1951, Madras, v. 3, Part I, p. 15.

Notwithstanding this increase, a slightly decreasing but statistically insignificant trend is seen from 1891 to 1941. Given a rising population, this suggests the setting up of more households. Ethnographic studies also support the census information. Kathleen Gough's study of changing household structure in a village in central Kerala between 1948-49 and 1964 suggests a decrease in complexity but only a slight decrease in size. Gough found that the average size of households decreased from 6.8 members in 1949 to 6.4 members in 1964.⁴² She found greater reliance on individual occupations to be associated with the tendency to live in nuclear households or in simpler kinds of joint households.⁴³

⁴⁰ G. Arunima, 'Matriliney and Its Discontents', *India International Centre Quarterly*, Summer/Monsoon 1995, p. 162.

⁴¹ *Census of India*, 1951, Madras, Vol. 3, Part I, p. 15.

⁴² Kathleen Gough, 'Changing Households in Kerala', in Dharendra Narain (ed.), *Explorations in the Family and Other Essays*, Bombay, 1965, p. 237.

⁴³ Kathleen Gough, 'Changing households in Kerala', p. 264.

The increase in the partitioning of Nayar *tharavads* and the move away from agriculture towards the service sector appears to have been responsible for this phenomenon. It must be recognised that the proportion of the population married, and the effective age of first marriage, are not merely cultural artefacts but are closely connected with changing material conditions.

This brings us to another factor which could have stimulated the postponement of marriage—the move away from agriculture towards the service sector. The agrarian population of Malabar constituted roughly 60 per cent of the total population till the 1930s. By 1951 this declined to about 51 per cent. Interestingly, the decline in agricultural occupations was offset not by an increase in trade, industry or commerce but in the residual census category of 'Others'. This points to a marked increase in the service sector, an area which has not received any scholarly attention. This shift in the district's occupational structure acted as a catalyst in the break-up of the Nayar *tharavad* and the demand for the abolition of matriliney. With the decline of landlord-run large wet-paddy cultivation, there was a shift towards the greater use of casual wage labour in place of tied labour.

Fertility measures exhibit some correspondence with caste and occupational classes. Once again, only CWR figures are available. Upper caste fertility is seen to be slightly lower than that for lower castes (Table 10).

Table 10
Caste-wise Child-Woman Ratio (CWR)

	1891	1921
Nambudiri	526	569
Cheruman	618	590
Tiyan	626	609
Parayan	659	639

Source: Census, 1891, 1921

In 1931, once again we find the same trend. The proportion of children under 14 years of age to married women between ages 14 and 43 was 191, 214 and 195 respectively for Malayali Brahmins, Nayars and Parayans.⁴⁴ The 1951 census gives occupation-wise and not caste-wise fertility data. However, the fertility differentials noticed in the earlier caste-based figures appear to persist.

Cultivators (both tenants and landlords) had a CWR of 588 while cultivating labourers and rent receivers returned a CWR of 508 and 468 respectively.⁴⁵ Since the CWR uses the number of children aged 0–5 years

⁴⁴ *Census of India, Madras, 1931, Vol. 1, p. 122.*

⁴⁵ *Census of India, Madras, Vol. 3, 1951.*

as the numerator, it has a tendency to understate actual fertility among the lower castes because infant and child mortality would be higher among the poorer castes/classes compared to the Brahmins and the Nayars. If births were taken as the numerator, we could expect larger differentials in fertility. These estimates suggest a weakly correlated relationship between fertility on the one hand, and occupation and property inheritance, on the other.

Fertility indices also showed some correlation with market fluctuations. The detrended CWR exhibited a statistically significant causal connection with prices with a two-year lag between 1874 and 1930.⁶ Studies of pre-industrial England and imperial China have showed how nuptiality responded strongly to short-term economic fluctuations.⁷ In the absence of annual nuptiality data, we can only speculate that this fertility reduction, during economically hard times, was effected through postponement of marriages.

In this article, we have made a preliminary attempt to demonstrate that registration data, despite its many shortcomings can be utilised in conjunction with Census information for historical demographic exercises. The vital rates estimated from registration figures and the censuses suggest a moderate rather than high fertility regime in colonial Malabar in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, reinforcing the point that substantial historically and geographically patterned variations in India's demographic past need to be emphasised. CBRs around 40 in this region are very close to those for pre-industrial western Europe. Further, as in western Europe, moderate fertility levels were attained through the mechanism of marriage restrictions. Conscious fertility control within marriages is not indicated by the data examined. Fertility exhibited some congruence with landholding patterns, caste and inheritance rules.



⁶ Least Squares Regression:

Residual CBR = Residual Price of Rice $(-2) \times -0.0329^* + \text{Constant} \times -0.0329^*$
significant at $t_{10} n = 44$.

⁷ See Wrigley and Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541-1871*, Cambridge, 1981; James Lee, 'The Historical Demography of late Imperial China: Recent Research Result and Implications', Mimeograph, 1992.



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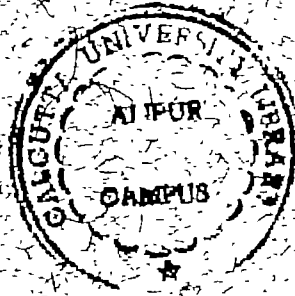
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Princes, Peasants, and the Paramount Power

Hira Singh

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Coastal trade and voyages in Konkan: The early medieval scenario

Ranabir Chakravarti

University of Calcutta

I

Considering the predominantly agrarian nature of the material milieu of the Indian economy and society, the thrust of the economic historian on the study of the agricultural conditions and systems in India during the remote and recent past is expected, and logical as well. Discussions on the non-agrarian sector of the economy, for instance on crafts, commerce and urbanisation, are situated in Indian economic historiography, generally within the broader framework of agrarian material conditions. The immensely diverse products—agricultural and crafts—in the subcontinent which is endowed with a number of arterial routes (overland and fluvial) made India a major theatre for brisk exchanges of consumable articles as well as of information and ideas from the remote past onwards. Along with the changing perspectives of the study of pre-modern Indian trade, the recent spurt in publications on the maritime history of the Indian Ocean has driven home the importance of commerce in the socio-economic and political history of the subcontinent. The historian of Indian trade demonstrates a lively interest in the commerce of what is termed as the early modern period, located roughly from the sixteenth to the middle or the end of the eighteenth centuries. The enriched economic historiography of India, especially that of trade, has come a long way from some well-entrenched notions, a typical example of which is:

The moving force from the first to the last came from the West, the little changing people of the East allowed the West to find them out. We have then, on one side, India of the Orient, then as now, a disjointed

aggregate of countries, but without the uniting force of British rule which she now has, and while open to commerce, content generally to remain within her borders to engage in agriculture.¹

The image of the eternal East, as a counterpoint to the vibrant, dynamic and therefore dominant Occident, is no longer seriously accepted in the understanding of India's past, thanks to the availability of fresh data and altered perspectives. The active role of the elements of change, though often at a slow or perhaps nearly imperceptible pace in the socio-economic, political and cultural lives of early India, is now discernible and judged irrespective of numerous dynastic shifts. Noticeable diversities in dispersed areas of the vast subcontinent rule out a uniform and unilinear pattern of development in the socio-economic and political life. This is, however, not to deny the significance of the forces of long-term continuity and some general and common tendencies in various facets of Indian history.²

These preliminary remarks lead us to our present enquiries into some aspects of the history of early Indian trade. The extreme paucity of data on commercial activities and the virtual absence any statistical information are major obstacles for the economic historian of early India to present the case. There is an admitted preference for the study of India's long-distance contacts through overland and maritime routes, chiefly because of the availability of some evidence in non-indigenous sources. Discussions on inland trading network seem to be given a position secondary to that of long-distance 'foreign trade'. This is generally seen in the conventional narratives on trade routes (overland and riverine), commercial centres and professional bodies of merchants. A study of the coastal networks as an important aspect of early Indian economic history is even rarer, and, at best, casually and summarily treated. Both the coasts of India do figure in studies of early trade, but mainly in the context of identifying and locating old ports. There are a number of aspects which, if appropriately pursued and probed into, may enliven the nature and patterns of movements of merchants, commodities and crafts along the two lengthy seabords of India during the pre-modern times. This is the kind of enquiry that prompts us to take up a perusal of the coastal commerce and voyages in Konkan as a case-study.

¹ E.H. Warmington, *Commerce Between India and the Roman Empire*, London, 1974, pp. 1-2.

² R.S. Sharma and D N. Jha, 'The Economic History of India upto A.D. 1200: Trends and Prospects', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* (hereafter JESHO), Vol. 17, 1974, pp. 48-80; also Romila Thapar, ed., *Recent Perspectives of Early Indian History*, Bombay, 1995.

II

The two long coastlines of India jutting out into the Indian Ocean are salient features of the physiography of this area and have a distinct influence on the formation of harbours and the associated trading network—overland, coastal and overseas. The western seaboard of the Indian subcontinent, stretching from the Indus delta to Kanyakumari where it joins the eastern seaboard at the tip of the peninsula, has a more indented nature than its eastern counterpart. This must have facilitated the rise of a number of natural harbours dotting the west coast which, however, has no major delta (except the Indus delta), conducive to human settlements and diverse activities. The eastern littoral has, on the other hand, a number of deltas, including the Gangetic delta, the largest and the most populated one in the world. The two littorals in their own way have distinct places in the history of the movements of men, merchandise and ideas among the countries of the Indian Ocean.

This would logically take us to assume that the Indian Ocean, embracing 20 per cent of the total maritime space of the earth and having around it no less than thirty-seven populous nations (covering nearly one-third of the world population), has been one of the major factors of unity among these areas and peoples with immense historical consequences.³ The Indian Ocean clearly dominates the seaface of Asia. Seen from this angle, a long-term perspective—spanning over the last two millennia—would project Asia and not Europe as the leading maritime continent of the world.⁴ This is also reflected by the proliferation of publications on the Indian Ocean.⁵ The thrust of these studies is obviously on the period from A.D. 1500 onwards, as evidence prior to that is extremely meagre. Yet, the urge is felt to push the study of the Indian Ocean situation prior to A.D. 1500 with a

³ Juha J. Gotthold (with Donald W. Gotthold), *The Indian Ocean*, in the *World Bibliographical Series*, Vol. 85, Oxford, 1988. The map of the Indian Ocean, published by the National Atlas and Thematic Mapping Organisation, situates this maritime space right upto the Cape of Good Hope in the west, to Antarctica in the south, includes the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf and the Bay of Bengal, but excludes the Java and the South China Seas. The southern boundary of the Indian Ocean, according to the Australian map, is indicated by the Southern Sea after which is Antarctica. See Ashin Dasgupta and M.N. Pearson, eds, *India and the Indian Ocean 1500–1800*, Calcutta, 1987, p. 10.

⁴ Franz Broeze, ed., *Brides of the Sea*, Kensington, 1989, p. 8. Charles Verlinden, 'The Indian Ocean: The Ancient Period and the Middle Ages', in Satish Chandra, ed., *The Indian Ocean: Explorations in History, Commerce and Politics*, New Delhi, 1987, p. 27 points out that the relative smallness of the Indian Ocean was actually advantageous to intense and regular movements in this maritime space.

⁵ Dasgupta and Pearson, eds, *India and the Indian Ocean*; Chandra, ed., *The Indian Ocean*; K.N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean from the Rise of Islam to 1700*, Cambridge, 1985; *idem*, *Asia before Europe: Economic Civilisation in the Indian Ocean from the Rise of Islam to 1700*, Cambridge, 1990.

view to having a more comprehensive understanding of seafarings and the associated communities in the past.⁶

This might set the stage for our enquiry into coastal trading and voyages in one of the sectors of the western littorals of India, namely Konkan, during the early medieval period, i.e., from A.D. 600–1300 (though sources of post-1300 A.D. days would be occasionally cited to drive home certain points). The choice of the area and period of the present essay is shaped largely by the fact that the Konkan coast, situated between the Gujarat and the Malabar littorals, appears to have often been overshadowed by the two premier segments of the western coast. While sustained research has been done on the commercial activities in the Gujarat and Malabar areas during the period A.D. 1000–1300, similar exercises regarding commerce in the Konkan coast are generally limited to the early centuries of the Christian era, a period yielding archaeological and literary (including classical texts) evidence.⁷ To suggest the possibility of trade in the Konkan coast during the early middle ages—which is sought in this paper—one also has to come to terms with the well-known perception of the decline of trade, lesser use of minted currency and widespread urban decay in India (especially from A.D. 300–1000), which have been presented by a group of historians as

⁶ See, for example, Genevieve Bouchon and Denys Lombard, 'The Indian Ocean in the Fifteenth Century', in Dasgupta and Pearson, eds, *India and the Indian Ocean*, pp. 46–70; also Kenneth McPherson, *The Indian Ocean: A History of People and the Sea*, Delhi, 1993. Historians of the Indian Ocean, despite their divergent opinions and debates, are largely inspired by the seminal researches of Fernand Braudel who, in the context of the Mediterranean region, emphasised the unity between the land and the sea. Cf. Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Phillip II*, tr. S. Reynolds, Vol. I, London, 1972, p. 14. Pearson feels that the term 'Indian Ocean' originates from the early medieval Arab expression *al bahr al Hindi* (cf. the Persian term *darya'l akhzar*), in Dasgupta and Pearson, eds, *India and the Indian Ocean*, pp. 9–10. But the antiquity of such an expression goes back to the time of Pliny (death A.D. 79) who coined the term *mari Indicum* (*Naturalis Historia*, tr., J. Rackham, London, 1942, p. 381) or the Indian Sea. This was not the same as the entire area now designated as the Indian Ocean, but seems to have stood for the western sector of the Indian Ocean in the first century A.D. I am grateful to Professor B.N. Mukherjee for kindly drawing my attention to this passage. The expression *al bahr al Hindi* in the early medieval and the medieval times did not, however, denote the entire Indian Ocean, but embraced the Arabian Sea. It was clearly different from the *bahr Harkal* (or Harkand), i.e., the present Bay of Bengal. It was so named by the Arabs after Harkela, the south-eastern most parts of present Bangladesh. An inscription from Bengal, dated A.D. 971, clearly speaks of *Vaigastigara* or the sea of Bengal. See, in this context, Ranabir Chakravarti, 'Vaigastigara-sarabhāṇḍāriyaka: A Riverine Port in Early Medieval Bengal', in Debala Mitra, ed., *Explorations in Art and Archaeology of South Asia, Essays Dedicated to N.G. Majumdar*, Calcutta, 1996, pp. 557–72.

⁷ V.K. Jain, *Trade and Traders in Western India: 1000–1300*, Delhi, 1990, and Meera Abraham, *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India*, Delhi, 1988 are recent examples of the growth of our knowledge about early medieval trade in Gujarat and Karnataka. See also, Himanshu Prabha Ray, *Monastery and Guild: Commerce Under the Śātavāhanas*, Delhi, 1986, for a survey of trade in the western and central Deccan (including the Konkan coast) during the early historical times.

constituting the salient features of Indian feudalism. Languishing trade during the early middle ages, in sharp contrast to the brisk and prosperous long-distance commerce in early historical times, is seen as being associated with the process of the emergence of the self-sufficient, enclosed rural society.⁸ Trade, or the relative absence of it, is portrayed in the historiography of Indian feudalism largely from the point of view of long-distance trade, both overland and overseas. It is time that adequate attention be paid to the study of coastal trade networks in early medieval times. This article is an attempt in that direction, with the Konkan coast taken up as a case in point. The availability of several epigraphic records (mostly land grants and rarely related to commercial activities directly, hence a tall order to make our point), regular notices in the Arab and Persian texts, occasional references in the business letters of medieval Jewish merchants and visual representations of local vessels have prompted us to take a close look at the Konkan littorals.⁹ No less encouraging for us has been the assertion that Konkan was best suited to the development of ports in the entire length of the western seaboard. 'Together with the towns in the estuaries at points where the tides carry in the boats, are formed two, sometimes even three lines of settlements corresponding to two or three degrees of marine penetration. At no other point of the western coast is this parallelism so obvious.'¹⁰ Konkan is 'held to include all the land which

⁸ R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism*, Delhi, 1980; B.N.S. Yadava, *Society and Culture in North India during the 12th century*, Allahabad, 1974; D.N. Jha, ed., *Feudal Social Formation in Early India*, Delhi, 1987 may be consulted to follow the arguments in favour of Indian feudalism. This has resulted in one of the major debates in Indian historiography. The concepts of a declining economy and political decentralisation have been strongly challenged by Harbans Mukhia, 'Was There Feudalism in Indian History?', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 8(3), 1981, pp. 273-310; D.C. Sircar, *Landlordism and Tenancy in Ancient and Medieval India*, Lucknow, 1969; *idem*, *The Emperor and His Subordinate Rulers*, Santiniketan, 1980. For an alternative and inclusive approach to the early medieval period, see B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *The Making of Early Medieval India*, Delhi, 1994; *idem*, 'State and Economy in North India: Fourth Century to Twelfth Century', in Romila Thapar, ed., *Recent Perspectives*, pp. 309-46. Reviewing the controversies regarding the prevalence of feudalism in early medieval India, B.D. Chattopadhyaya remarks, 'the important point really is that the debate is still alive and is unlikely to be reduced to futile polemics' (*Journal of Ancient Indian History*, Vol. 18 (1-2), 1991, p. 122). A recent statement on this debate and the changing perceptions about the early middle age in Indian history is made by Ranabir Chakravarti, 'Politics and Society in India, c. A.D. 300-1000', in K. Satchidananda Murty, ed., *Project on the History of Indian Science, Philosophy and Culture*, Vol. II (forthcoming).

⁹ Coastal western India, including Konkan, figures prominently in Perso-Arabic literature (ninth to fifteenth centuries). But a perception of the coastal area merely by summarising the secondary literature pertaining to these texts, as has recently been done by Andre Wink (*Al Hind*, Vol. I, Delhi, 1989) is hardly adequate.

¹⁰ J. Deloche, 'Geographical Consideration in the Localization of Ancient Seaports of India', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* (hereafter IESHR), Vol. 20(4), 1983, pp. 439-48; *idem*, *Transport and Communication in India Prior to Steam Locomotion*, II, Delhi, 1994. The quotation is from Deloche 'Geographical Consideration', p. 422.

lies between the Western Ghats and the Indian Ocean, from the latitude of Daman in the north to that of Terekhol, on the Goa frontier, in the south.¹¹ About 320 miles in length and varying in breadth from 30 to 60 miles, the area in question included the districts of Thana, Kolaba and Ratnagiri (Maharashtra), the native states of Jawhar, Janjira and Savantvadi of British India, and Goa.¹² Bassein near Bombay, or Bombay itself, is generally taken as the demarcating point between the northern and southern halves of the coastal strip. The northern part in general has greater agricultural potential and is well-connected to the Gujarat coast and Malwa, the latter often acting as a corridor between north India and the Deccan. The southern part of Konkan, though endowed with a number of excellent port-sites, does not command a rich hinterland which lies in the extremely dry and rugged area of Ratnagiri district. Konkan, which has the Sahyadri or the Western Ghat mountains on its east would have been cut off from the mainland in the interior but for a number of important passes (ghats) providing the main channel of communication between the littoral and the continental area (known in medieval and early modern times as the *desh* area). Thalghat connects the coast with Nasik, Bhorghat facilitates communications with the areas around Karle, Bhaja, Bedsa, etc., and Nanaghat offers linkages between the coast and Kalyan. Parghat is situated close by Bankot, an ancient port-site. Parghat stands between two ports, Dabhol and Jaigarh, while Ambhaghat joins up the south Konkan coast with the area around Karad in the present Satara district. Finally, the communication between Kolhapur and the harbour of Vijayadurga is provided by Phonda-ghat.¹³

The area was known as earliest Aparata, i.e., Aparānta, or the western frontier, according to Asoka's edicts of the third century B.C.¹⁴ It came into greater prominence during 200 B.C.—A.D. 300, experiencing the formation of secondary states (the Sātavāhanas and the Śaka Kṣatrapas of western India), the expansion of agriculture, crafts and trade and proliferation of religious centres.¹⁵ The anonymous author of *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (dated around the last quarter of the first century A.D.) and Ptolemy in his *Geographike Huphegesis* (middle of the second century A.D.) were aware of the importance of this coast in *Dachinabades* (= Sanskrit *Dakṣiṇā-patha*) for overseas trade of the Roman empire with India. But interlinkages between the ports of northern and southern Konkan are not clearly known during the early period. The term 'Konkana' or 'Kunkana' becomes

¹¹ *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency* (hereafter *GBP*), Vol. I, Pt. 2, 1896, p. ix.

¹² For general accounts of Thana, Kolaba, Janjira, Ratnagiri and Bombay see respectively *GBP*, Vols XIII, XVI, XI, X and XIV. For Goa, see, V.T. Gune, ed., *Gazetteer of the Union Territory of Goa, Daman and Diu*, Part 1 (Goa Gazetteer), Panaji, 1979; also *The Indian Ocean Pilot*, London, 1961, pp. 189–201 for the coastal areas of Goa and ports thereof.

¹³ Ray, *Monastery and Guild*.

¹⁴ R.G. Basak, *Asokan Edicts*, Calcutta, 1959.

¹⁵ Ray, *Monastery and Guild*.

more prominent, replacing earlier Aparānta from the early medieval times both in indigenous and non-Indian descriptions of the coast.¹⁶ The well-known Arabic terms 'Kunkan', 'Kamkam', 'Makamkam' and 'Kamkar'¹⁷ are certainly based on 'Konkana'. 'Kamkam' (and its variants) are almost invariably equated in the Arab texts with the kingdom of Balhara or the Rāṣtrakūṭa kingdom in the Deccan (Balhara being the Arabicisation of *Vallabharāja*, the dynastic epithet of the Rāṣtrakūṭa rulers).¹⁸ Interestingly, Ahmad b. Majid al-Najdi, the celebrated navigator of the fifteenth century, separated Konkan, by which he denoted north Konkan from Tulwan, i.e., the southern Konkan coast. The demarcating point between the two sections was Ra's Mirya (= Mirya Donghur, after the famous port of Dabul or Dabhole) wherefrom the Tulwan coast stretched, according to Ibn Majid, to Juwah-Sindabur or Goa.¹⁹

III

The Konkan coast does not appear as prominently in our evidence of the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. as it did during the first three centuries of the Christian era. From the middle of the fifth century onwards began to figure, at several coastal sites in north Konkan, the Red Polished Ware (RPW), a particular type of pottery which was also discovered from a large number of archaeological sites in or near the coastal areas of Gujarat, the Indus delta, the Makran coast and the south-western coast of Iran.²⁰ This

¹⁶ H.C. Raychaudhuri, 'Geographical Conditions', in G. Yazdani, ed., *Early History of the Deccan*, Vol. I, London, 1960, elaborately discusses the changing connotations of the term 'Konkan'.

¹⁷ Cf. S.M.H. Nainar, *Arab Geographers' Knowledge of Southern India*, Madras, 1942, for a general survey of the connotations of these terms.

¹⁸ Though the Rāṣtrakūṭas were very much a power of the interior, the Arab writers would see them as the ruler of Konkan. Similarly, Marco Polo meant by Tana both the port and the Yādava kingdom. He also equated the Kākatīya kingdom of the eastern Deccan with their most important port Mutfli or Motupalli in the Andhra coast. The name of the port through which the information about the adjacent interior was collected was often extended to cover the entire realm which had its main seat of power in the mainland and not on the coast. See Ranabir Chakravarti, 'Horse Trade and Piracy at Tana (= Thana, Maharashtra, India): Gleanings from Marco Polo', *JESHO*, Vol. 34, 1991, pp. 189-217; *idem*, 'Rulers and Ports: Visakhapattanam and Motupalli in Early Medieval Andhra', in K.S. Mathew, ed., *Mariners, Merchants and Oceans*, Delhi, 1995, pp. 53-78.

¹⁹ *Kitāb al-Fawa'id fi usul al-baḥr wa'l-qawā'id*, tr. by G.R. Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation in the Indian Ocean before the Coming of the Portuguese*, London, 1971, pp. 450, 454.

²⁰ Nancy Pinto Orton, 'Red Polished Ware in Gujarat: A Catalogue of Twelve Sites', Vimala Begley and Richard Daniel de Puma, eds, *Rome and India: The Ancient Sea Trade*, Delhi, 1991, for an exhaustive discussion on the RPW sites and the indication of commercial network; also, D. Whitehouse and Andrew Williamson, 'Sasanian Maritime Trade', *Iran*, Vol. 11, 1973, pp. 29-49. The Rouletted Ware found in a large number of coastal sites from Tamil Nadu to West Bengal on the eastern sea-board is similarly indicative of a brisk coastal network along the entire length of the eastern littoral from c. 200 B.C. to A.D. 200. Vimala Begley, 'Ceramic Evidence for Pre-Peripplus Trade on the Indian Coasts', in Begley and de Puma, eds, *Rome and India*, pp. 157-96.

archaeological evidence is an indicator of the distribution of exchangeable commodities and movements of people and possibly their vessels too, along a distinct line of coastal communication. The logical inference would be to argue for coastal linkages between the northern Konkan and the Gujarat-Kathiawad coasts which had further connections with the Indus delta and the Makran coast. The details of such coastal voyages, including the modes of transport used, are only dimly known. By the end of the sixth century A.D., coastal Konkan began to have a distinct attraction for the rising political power of the Cālukyas of Badami (near Bijapur in the north-eastern part of Karnataka). Though the Cālukyas had their primary stronghold in the interior, Kīrttivarman I, one of the prominent early kings of the dynasty, was credited in the famous Aihole *prastasti* as a night of destruction (*kālarātri*) to three of his adversaries in the Deccan, namely the Nalas, the Kadambas and the Mauryas. The Kadambas ruled over Vanavāsī near the coast of north Kanara and the Mauryas held their sway over Aparānta or the northern Konkan area. The aggressive designs and attitudes of the Cālukyas to the western sea-board intensified during the time of Pulakeśin II (A.D. 610–42) who made the Cālukyas the most formidable regional power in the Deccan.²¹ His vessels were instrumental in capturing from the Mauryas of northern Konkan the island of Purī, lauded as the very goddess of fortune in the western sea (*aparajaladherlakṣmī*) in his famous Aihole *prastasti*.²² Purī is generally identified with the Elephanta Island near Bombay. The description may suggest the use of warships by the Cālukya king from north Kanara to north Konkan along the coast to capture the island. It is only likely that such coastal voyages were possible and practicable for both peaceful commercial and aggressive purposes. The definite interests of the Cālukyas in exercising some control over certain parts of coastal western India are further demonstrated by his conquest and annexation of Lāṭa (southern Gujarat), adjacent to Konkan, where a viceregal house under Cālukya suzerainty was also founded by Pulakeśin II.²³

IV

A greater number of Konkan ports began to appear from the ninth century onwards in Arabic and Persian sources, inscriptions of the Śilāhāras of

²¹ Yazdani, *Early History*, Vol. 1.

²² D.C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History and Civilisation* (hereafter *SI*), Vol. II, Delhi, 1983, p. 446.

²³ No details of the use of vessels along the north Konkan coast are available from the *prastasti*, but there are representations of sea-going vessels, including those carrying horses and troops—probably depicting troops to conquer Sri Lanka—in a few paintings from Ajanta. Whether these visual representations may have some relevance to the then pattern of coastal voyages cannot be ascertained. See, in this context, D. Schlingloff, *The Ajanta Paintings*, Delhi, 1968.

north and south Konkan and Kolhapur and also in the business letters of Jewish merchants. Without demeaning the importance of the Arabic texts for the study in question, it must, however, be kept in mind that only a handful of Arab writers actually visited Konkan. Their descriptions are often summaries of earlier accounts, stereotyped and repetitive. There is little room for doubt that the coast in question was dotted with a number of harbours during the early middle ages. From the north to the south, they are as follows: Saṁyāna/Sindan (= Sanjan in Thana district), Śrīsthānaka/Tana/Bana (= Thana in Thana district), Śūrpāraka/Subara (Sopara in Thana district), Cemulīya/Saimur (= Chaul in Kolaba district), Nāgapura (Nagav in Kolaba district), Balipattana (Kharepatan in Ratnagiri district), Gopākāpattana/Gove (Goa), Candrapura/Sindabur (Chandore to the south of Goa). The Arab accounts speak prominently of Sindabur, which is the same as Candrapura, a port and capital of the Kadambas of Goa. Gopākāpattana or Gove originally had been an important port under the Kadambas and the capital was later transferred there. But the Arabs preferred the name Sindabur and even in Ibn Majīd's manual of navigation it was bracketed with Juwah or Goa. The conquest of Goa by the Bahmani sultanate led to the foundation of what later became famous in the Portuguese sources as Velva (old) Goa. These harbours are easily recognisable in indigenous sources as they are called *velakula* or *paṭṭana*. Some of the ports enlisted above, like Śūrpāraka and Cemulya had been known since the early historical times, especially in the Buddhist and Jaina sources and inscriptions. But Śrīsthānaka or modern Thana was known at best as a town (*Thānenagara*), but not as a leading port.²⁴ What had been referred to only occasionally as Sazantion (by Ptolemy) and Sañjaya (in the Nagarjunakonda inscription of Ābhīra Vasuṣeṇa of about A.D. 330), became much more prominent as a leading port in north Konkan during the early medieval period.²⁵ Ports in the southern Konkan coast mentioned above appear only in passing references in early historical sources and began to enjoy some prominence since the early middle ages. Prior to the early medieval times, our knowledge about harbours in southern Konkan is thus very meagre. The early medieval times therefore witnessed the emergence of more and newer ports in the Konkan littorals than the early historical period.

²⁴ S.B. Deo and R.S. Gupte, *Excavations at Bhokardhan*, Nagpur, 1974, p. 77.

²⁵ The importance of Sanjan as a major port in early medieval Konkan has been dealt by Ranabir Chakravarti, 'Monarchs, Merchants and Matha in Northern Konkan (900-1053)', *IESHR*, Vol. 27(2), 1990, pp. 189-208. The possibilities of the export of Indian indigo to al Fustat (Old Cairo) through this port during the tenth-eleventh centuries have been highlighted in Ranabir Chakravarti, 'The Export of Sindani Indigo from India to the "west" in the Eleventh Century', *Indian Historical Review* (hereafter *IHR*), Vol. 18(1-2), pp. 18-30.

V

The coastal trading network along the Konkan littorals makes more interesting readings from the accounts of Arab authors. One of the earliest such impression is available from the accounts of Sulaiman (A.D. 851). He informs us about the contacts between Sindan or Sanjan in Konkan and Mali or Malabar, the journey spanning for five days.²⁶ A similar information is also provided by Ibn Khurdadbeh (A.D. 820–911).²⁷ But no details of this journey are given. It would not, however, be difficult to assume that the two Arab writers indicated the possibilities of coastal linkages between Konkan and Malabar in the ninth century. A twelfth century Jewish business letter may suggest that there could have been a port named Malabar located in the homonymous littoral.²⁸ One is not sure whether the accounts of Sulaiman and Ibn Khurdadbeh spoke of a journey from Sanjan in the Konkan coast to a port named Malabar or referred to a trip from a Konkanese harbour to the southernmost point of the western sea-board of India.

Clearer images than this are seen in the fascinating stories in the *Kitab Ajaib-al-Hind* of the famous seafarer Buzurg ibn Shahrīyar of Ramhormuz (c. middle of the tenth century). Buzurg narrates certain tales which impress upon us the close linkages between Saymur, Subara (= ancient Śūrpāraka, modern Sopara near Bombay), Tana and Kanbaya (= Cambay in Gujarat).²⁹ The interconnections among Sindan, Subara and Saimur are reported by Ibn Haukal (A.D. 975) also.³⁰ Subara is described as having close contacts with Kanbaya or Cambay, the leading port in southern Gujarat. This implies coastal communications and linkages between harbours situated in north Konkan and southern Gujarat littorals. This is further corroborated by the anonymous author of the well-known Persian geographical text, *Hudud-al-Alam* (A.D. 982), which enlists Kanbaya with the three Konkanese ports, Sindan, Subara and Saymur.³¹ By the last quarter of the tenth century, Saimur seems to have emerged, as per the

²⁶ Sulaiman's impressions about India and China have been translated into English by S. Maqbul Ahmed, *Arabic Classical Accounts of India and China*, Shimla 1989.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ S.D. Goitein, 'Portrait of a Medieval Indian Trader: Three Letters from the Cairo Geniza', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. 48(2), 1987, pp. 448–64.

²⁹ Buzurg ibn Shahrīyar's Arab accounts have been edited and translated into English by G.S.P. Freeman-Grenville, *The Book of the Wonders of India*, London and the Hague, 1981. Of the 136 tales, anecdotes and apophthegms in this text, twenty-nine are dated, and these range in the span of A.D. 900 to A.D. 953. 'The span 900 to 953 seems a very reasonable life span for Buzurg, in which to collect so many tales'. *Ibid.*, p. xviii; the network between Konkan and Gujarat is indicated on p. xxxiii.

³⁰ H.M. Elliot and J. Dowson, trans. *The History of India as Told by Its Own Historians*, Vol. 1, Allahabad, 1964, p. 39.

³¹ *Hudud al Alam*, trans., V. Minorsky, London, 1937, p. 88.

impressions of Ibn Haukal, as a point of departure for voyages to Serendib or Sri Lanka. This is a long coastal voyage covering the entire length of the Konkan coast and also cruising along the whole of Malabar. Such a voyage was known at least since the time of Khurdadbeh in the late ninth century; there is, thus, a continuity in the pattern of network and voyages between Konkan and Sri Lanka through Malabar. The important point is that Konkan offered at least two points of such a contact: Sindan in north Konkan since the late ninth century and Saimur in the south about a century later.

During the closing decades of the tenth century, the northern sector of the Konkan coast was under the firm occupation of the Śilāhāras of north Konkan who served as powerful vassals of the Western Čalukyas, the power that had succeeded the Rāṣṭrakūṭas, the erstwhile overlord of the Śilāhāras, as the most formidable power in Maharashtra and Karnataka since A.D. 973. In A.D. 993 Aparājita (A.D. 975–1010), the Śilāhāra ruler of north Konkan, claimed in a copper plate to have conquered the area from Lāṭa (southern Gujarat) to the country of Bhillama (Khandesh) and from the western sea (*paścimābdhi*) to Candrapura (region around Goa).²² That he was also in firm control over the region around Saṁyāna is also evident from his records. The significant point here is, therefore, the attempt to establish control over the entire length of the Konkan coast by a ruler of northern Konkan.

VI

Our foregoing discussions on trade and voyages in the Konkan coast have admittedly revolved around the ports of northern Konkan; harbours of southern Konkan were less prominent than their northern counterparts. But the situation seems to have been changing in an appreciable way at the turn of the eleventh century. A particular port demands our close scrutiny. This is Balipattana of the epigraphic records of the Śilāhāras of southern Konkan and identifiable with present Kharepatan in the Ratnagiri district, Maharashtra. A record of A.D. 1008, which contains the earliest epigraphic reference to this port, credits Dhammirāja of the Śilāhāra house of southern Konkan for the foundation of Balipattana. The inscription in question explicitly mentions the arrival of vessels (*pravahana*) from Candrapura to Balipattana. While this speaks of the coastal voyages between Balipattana and the area around Goa further south, voyages from the northern sector of Konkan to the same port are mentioned therein as well. Ships from Cemulya or Chaul and Kandalamūla (not identified) came to Balipattana. Balipattana thus emerged as a point of convergence of vessels from the

²² V.V. Mirashi, ed., *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, hereafter CII, VI, Delhi, 1978, pp. 17–28, verses 31–32.

coast near Goa and those from the north of Balipattana. The rise of Balipattana as an important point in the coastal network of Konkan since the eleventh century can be logically suggested. The Kharepatan record of A.D. 1008 also informs us of the tolls levied on vessels that anchored at Balipattana, thereby implying the revenue yielding potentials of coastal commerce in the Konkan coast and the local coastal ruler's awareness of the same. Vessels arriving from Candrapura and Cemulya were, however, exempted from tolls and customs. The likely reason for such fiscal exemptions would be to encourage commercial linkages of Balipattana with two important harbours situated to its north and south.³³

Balipattana once again figures in a record of A.D. 1094 and in a more prominent manner than we have previously noted. This Kharepatan record³⁴ was issued by the northern Konkan Śilāhāra ruler Anantadeva, leaving little room for doubt that the Śilāhāras of north Konkan were enjoying political control over Balipattana around the last decade of the twelfth century. According to the Kharepatan plates of A.D. 1094, vessels of Balipattana touched northern harbours like Sthānaka (Thana), Śūrparaka (Sopara), Nāgapura (Nagav) and Cemūlya (Chaul). While the record of A.D. 1008 spoke of the vessels that reached Balipattana from a few ports, the plates of A.D. 1094 mentioned voyages of crafts from Balipattana itself to northern ports. No less significant is the comparison between the contents of the two Kharepatan records of A.D. 1008 and 1094. The latter one offers us more names of harbours having contacts with Balipattana than the earlier inscription. Thus, an image of a growing coastal voyage and trade network to and from Balipattana spanning over nearly eight decades emerges from the available epigraphic data. The development of coastal trade in the southern sector of the Konkan littorals, with Balipattana in a more prominent position, appears to have resulted because of the gradual spread of agrarian settlements, diversification of crops, proliferation of crafts and growth of commerce in Karnataka during the early medieval times.³⁵

³³ There are several known cases of remission of tolls and customs at ports by early medieval rulers with a view to attract maritime trade and merchants. Kulottunga I (1070-1120), the Cola emperor, is known to have taken such steps to encourage trade. See Ranabir Chakravarti, 'Rulers and Ports: Visakhapattanam and Motupalli in Early Medieval Andhra', in K.S. Mathew, ed., *Mariners, Merchants and Oceans*, pp. 57-78.

³⁴ *CII*, VI, pp. 115-20.

³⁵ The distinct possibilities of the growth in the rural economy, largely because of the spread of agricultural settlements by the regular issuance of copper plate charters, have been highlighted by R.N. Nandi, 'Growth of Rural Economy in Early Feudal India', Presidential Address, Ancient India Section, *Proceedings of Indian History Congress*, 45th session, 1984 (this has a thrust on the situation in the Karnataka region); R.S. Sharma, 'How Feudal Was Indian Feudalism?', in Hermann Kulke, ed., *The State in India, 1100-1700*, Delhi, 1994; for a general account of crafts and commerce see G.R. Kuppuswamy, *Economic Conditions in Karnataka (A.D. 973-1336)*, Dharwar, 1975; the activities of merchants in the Konkan coast have been discussed by Ranabir Chakravarti, 'Merchants of Konkan', *IESHR*, Vol. 23, 1986,

The close association between Sindabur (the area around Candrapura, located to the south of modern Goa)³⁶ and contiguous Goa is also evident from the use of the expression Juwah-Sindabur (obviously Goa-Sindabur) in the famous navigational manual of Ibn Majid, the celebrated *muallim* of the fifteenth century.³⁷ From the eleventh century onwards, the southernmost sector of the Konkan littorals began to come to limelight in the epigraphic documents of the local Kadamba rulers under the names Gopākapattana, Gopapura and Gove, all certainly referring to Goa of present times. The rise of the Kadambas of Goa could have contributed to the rise of Goa, which seems to have eclipsed the former glory of Candrapura or Chandore, situated to the south of Goa.

The Marcella copper plates of the Goa Kadamba ruler Śaṣṭhadeva II, dated 960 Śaka era, i.e., A.D. 1038, record a number of sacred centres visited by the ruler for the purpose of pilgrimages.³⁸ These include a visit to Kollapura (i.e., modern Kolhapur) to worship Mahālakṣmī, indicating thereby the contacts between the region around Goa and Kolhapur.³⁹ But more interesting than this account is that of his pilgrimage to Sthānka and Someśvara by having crossed the sea (*ambhonidhipāraga*).⁴⁰ This is a clear account of a long voyage (or voyages) along the western seaboard, reaching up to not only Thana in the north Konkan coast, but also extending to Somanātha—a famous pilgrimage and a port—in the Kathiawad coast. This may lead to a logical inference that the first-half of the eleventh century witnessed an extension of the already existing coastal network between north and south Konkan to the Kathiawad coast, touching the Gujarat coast. Such voyages could easily have been undertaken for commercial or cultural intentions or for a combination of both. A similar voyage, but with a more elaborate narrative, figures in an inscription at Narendra of A.D. 1125, issued during the reign of Vikramāditya VI (A.D. 1076–1126 of the Western Cālukya house) and his vassal Jayakeśin II of the Kadamba family.⁴¹ It narrates (verses 7–8) a voyage undertaken by Jayakeśin's ancestor Caṭṭāyadeva, eulogised as the Lord of the Ocean, from

pp. 207–15. There is also a distinct possibility that the linkages and network between the rural area and the larger urban centres (including port and political centres) in the Deccan during the early middle ages were facilitated by the emergence of a type of trade centre, called *penṭhā/punthā/pinṭā*, in textual and epigraphic sources from early medieval Deccan. These seem to closely correspond to *peths* of modern times. For a relevant discussion see Ranabir Chakravarti, 'The *Penṭhā* as a Centre of Trade in Early Medieval Deccan' (forthcoming).

³⁶ G. Moraes, 'Sindabur of the Arab Authors', *Journal of Indian History*, Vol. 10, 1931, pp. 191–95 discusses the identification and location of this port.

³⁷ Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation*, p. 455.

³⁸ G.M. Moraes, *Kadamba Kula* (hereafter *KK*), Bombay, 1931, pp. 387–93.

³⁹ For a discussion on the cult of Mahālakṣmī at Kolhapur, see V.V. Mirashi, *CII*, VI, chapter on religious conditions.

⁴⁰ *KK*, p. 388, lines 9–11.

⁴¹ Lionel D. Barnett, 'Inscriptions at Narendra', *Epigraphia Indica* (hereafter *EI*), XIII, pp. 298ff, especially, p. 302.

Gove to Saurashtra in his own ships; his principal intention being the visit to the temple of Somanātha, Caṭṭāya was further praised for having lowered the price of root camphor. Verses 11–12 describe his receiving a daughter of Mummuni of Thāneya (probably a Śilāhāra ruler of north Konkan with his seat of power at Thana). The above account, spread over four verses, once again informs us about the regularity of coastal connections between Goa and Saurashtra via Thana since the first-half of the eleventh century. The description of this voyage from Goa or its neighbouring areas to the Kathiawad coast seems to have been a regular facet of the court poetry in the Kadamba records.

There is an interesting variation to this theme in another inscription, once again describing a voyage to Somanātha. The voyage started from Candrapura with Guhalladeva, the successor of Ṣaṣṭha I, on board the ship which suffered a wreck around Goa. There he was rescued by an Arab Muslim merchant named Āliya, which is certainly the Sanskritised form of the name Ali (*ālīyavarṇasajajā āsit Āliyamākhyāya*). His grandson Sadhana was entrusted with the administration of the region around Goa by the Kadamba king Jayakeśi.⁴² The family of the said Muslim merchants appears to have been rewarded by the Kadambas for their act of rescuing a Kadamba ruler after a shipwreck. No less interesting is the epithet *nauvittakādhimāna* designating Āliya. This has been wrongly taken by Moraes to mean one 'whose navy was his wealth'.⁴³ The term *nauvittaka*, interchangeable with the Arabic term *nakhuda* (master of the ship), stands for a person whose wealth is associated with ships; in other words, the term stands for a ship-owning merchant. It does not carry any sense of a commander of the naval forces as was implied by Moraes.⁴⁴ Sadhana is further credited with establishing a *mijigiti* (i.e., *masjid* or mosque) which was to be maintained by tolls and other dues collected at the port of Goa which was regularly visited by vessels from Gurjjara (Gujarat), Saurashtra, Lāṭa (southern

⁴² V.T. Gune, 'Goa's Coastal and Overseas Trade from the Earliest Times till 1510 A.D.', in T.R. De Souza, ed., *Goa Through the Ages*, New Delhi, 1990, p. 128; this article offers useful data without critical assessment and analysis. The family history of Sadhana, the administrator of Goa under the Kadambas, is recorded in the Panjim copper plates (CP) of Jayakeśi I, dated 981 Śaka era, i.e., 1059 A.D.; KK, pp. 394–400.

⁴³ KK, p. 399.

⁴⁴ For a discussion on this term see Ranabir Chakravarti, 'Nauvittaka and Nakhuda', *Quarterly Review of the School of Historical and Cultural Studies*, Vol. 1(2), 1994, pp. 27–30. V.V. Mirashi, *CII*, VI also explained the term *nauvittaka* in a Śilāhāra inscription as an 'Admiral'; the limitations of this translation have been pointed out by Chakravarti, 'Merchants of Konkan'. An interesting feature of the early medieval trade in the coastal society along the western littorals is the close cooperation and interaction among the local Indian merchants and different types of Arab merchants with explicit or tacit approval of political powers. This is evident not only from the perusal of the Arab accounts but also from a close scrutiny of contemporary epigraphic records. Cf. Ranabir Chakravarti, 'Monarcha, Merchants and Maṭha', pp. 189–208; V.K. Jain, *Trade and Traders*.

Gujarat), Konkan, etc.⁴⁵ One can hardly miss the portrayal of the trade network between Goa and the Saurashtra coast, obviously through the Konkan and Gujarat littorals. These coastal communications for commercial purposes definitely bore revenue potentials to which the local political and administrative authorities at and around Goa must have been strongly attracted. This is clearly impressed upon by the provision of awarding punishment to evaders of the tolls and customs at Goa, according to this inscription.

More concrete information about the coastal network is available in a few business letters of Jewish merchants. The importance of these letters from the Cairo Geniza was established largely by the scholarship of S.D. Goitein and his colleagues. Significantly, several of these letters speak of the Jewish merchants' role in the trade with Aden and various areas in the southern part of India; they are designated as the 'India trader' by Goitein.⁴⁶ One such letter, belonging to the twelfth century, was sent from Aden by Madmum, a very prominent merchant, to Abraham b. Yishu, an important merchant residing at Manjrur or Mangalore. The letter informs us of a voyage from Manjrur to al-Dyyb or Diu, situated in southern Kathiawad.⁴⁷ We have already given impressions of coastal voyages from around Goa to Somanātha via Thana on the basis of the Kadamba inscriptions. This letter suggests that linkages also existed between Manjrur, a leading port in the northern part of Malabar, and Kathiawad; such a voyage must have passed through and/or touched harbours of southern and northern segments of the Konkan coast and a few in the Gujarat coast, though they were not exclusively mentioned in the letter.

It was through Abraham Yishu that a letter was sent by *nakhuda* (ship-owner) Mahruf b. Jacob in c.1145 from Manjrur to his brother-in-law (sister's husband), Judah b. Joseph ha-Kohen.⁴⁸ The letter tells us about

⁴⁵ KK, pp. 265–71. This is one of the early records of the construction of a mosque on or near an Indian port. A similar *mihgiti*, constructed at Somanatha in A.D. 1264, figures in a bilingual (Arabic and Sanskrit) inscription; see *Indian Antiquary*, XI, 1882, p. 242.

⁴⁶ S.D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, 4 volumes, Los Angeles and Berkeley, 1967–84; *idem*, *Jews and Arabs. Their Contacts through the Ages*, New York, 1964; *idem*, *Studies in Islamic history and Institutions*, Leiden, 1966; *idem*, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*, Princeton, 1973 (hereafter *Letters*); Shaul Shaked, *A Tentative Bibliography of Geniza Documents*, prepared under the direction of D.H. Baneth and S.D. Goitein, Paris, 1964; Norman A. Stillman, 'The Eleventh Century Merchant House of Ibn "Awkal"', *JESHO*, Vol. 16, 1973, pp. 15–88. These business letters of Jewish merchants can be of considerable value for our understanding of the maritime trade in India during the early medieval times, though such exercises are only occasionally attempted by Indian scholars. See for example, Ranabir Chakravarti, 'Maritime Trade Between Malabar and Aden: Gleanings from a Jewish Business Letter of 1139 A.D.', *Proceedings of Indian History Congress* (55th session), 1994; *idem*, 'The Export of Sindani Indigo from India to the "West" in the Eleventh Century', *IHR*, Vol. 18 (1–2), July 1991–January 1992 (published February 1996).

⁴⁷ S.D. Goitein, 'From Aden to India: Specimens of Correspondence of India Traders of the Twelfth Century', *JESHO*, Vol. 31, 1980, pp. 43–66.

⁴⁸ *Idem*, *Letters*: 62–65, letter no. 9.

Judah's coastal voyage from Manjrur to Tana (i.e., Thana) and then to Baruz (= Broach, at the mouth of the Narmada). During this voyage Judah was attacked by pirates and Mahrüz was naturally very concerned and anxious for his safety and security. The letter was originally sent to Tana from where Judah had left. Sheikh Abu'l Qasim ibn Qattan (a cotton dealer) informed Mahrüz at Manjrur that 'your excellency' (i.e., Judah) had by that time gone to Broach. Mahrüz urged his brother-in-law to return immediately to Mangalore from Kanbaya, i.e., Cambay, the famous port to early medieval and medieval Gujarat, situated to the north of Broach. 'The boats start presently from your place, from Kanbayat and from Tana; please set out immediately so that you reach Mangalore with vessels which God willing will soon reach Malibarat, Kayakannur and Mangalore.'²⁸ Judah then must have moved to Kanbaya or Cambay from Broach. There is also little room for doubt that both Kanbaya and Tana formed a significant part of the coastal network and both had linkages with Mangalore and other ports in the Malabar littorals.

Goitein's indefatigable researches on the Geniza documents have brought to light the activities of another India trader, 'Allan b. Hassun. In A.D. 1116-17 'Allan, a travelling merchant, arrived at Sindabur, i.e., the famous port around Goa, from Aden. His main intentions were to undertake a coastal voyage to Al-M . . . r which Goitein identifies with Manibar or Mulaybar. Manibar or Mulaybar could stand for, according to Goitein, either the entire Malabar coast—starting south of Goa—or a homonymous port in the Malabar littorals.'²⁹ These letters also speak of the unwillingness of the captain of the ship to move southwards from Sindabur and his eventual coastal voyage from Sindabur to Faknur and finally to Kullam. Faknur is the same as present Barkur up the Sitanadi river and Kullam is certainly the renowned port of Quilon. Allan's correspondence is thus a reliable pointer to the importance of Sindabur, as this southernmost port of the Konkan coast provided the southward link with harbours in the Malabar coast. The combined testimony of the Arab accounts, the Kadamba inscriptions and the Jewish business letters leaves a clear impression of the growing importance of Sindabur in the coastal network along the western sea-board of India. The extensive coastal voyages from Sindabur to a harbour as far north as Somanātha in the Kathiawad coast and to Kullam or Quilon in Malabar assumes considerable regularity from the middle of the eleventh century onwards.

VII

A survey of the boats/ships/vessels plying along the Konkan coast may now be taken up, following our study of the pattern of the coastal trade network

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

²⁹ Goitein, 'Portrait of a Medieval India Trader'.

in Konkan. There are very few ancient Indian manuals on shipping and shipbuilding. Historians of early Indian shipping have often presented data on typologies of ships/boats on the basis of the *Nāmalīṅgānūsāsana* of Amarasimha, the *Yuktikalpataru* of Bhoja and the *Abhidhānacintāmaṇi* of Hemacandra (the latter containing technical terms about different parts of the vessel and about the sailors and crews).³¹ Without belittling the importance of these textual data from theoretical/technical treatises, it remains open to question whether the textual descriptions about boats/ships corresponded to actualities. A more logical and cogent approach would be to look for relevant terms and accounts in epigraphic sources and visual representations of early vessels in art-historical materials. This would be a valid exercise as marine archaeology as a discipline is still in its infancy in India and no actual remains of an ancient ship has so far been discovered from the Indian seaboard.

One may recall here that the anonymous author of *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (assigned to the late first century A.D.) noted that the entrance to the celebrated port of Barygaza being extremely difficult, 'local fishermen in the king's service came out with crews [*sic.* rowers] and long ships, the kind called Trappaga and Kottymba'. These vessels piloted foreign ships to Barygaza or Broach from as far as Syrastrane, i.e., the region around Saurashtra.³² These piloting vessels therefore appear to have been utilised for coastal voyages over an impressive distance. The two types of coasters—*Trappaga* and *Kottymba*—of the *Periplus* correspond closely to the references to *Trapyaka* and *Kottimba* in the Jaina text *Arigavijjā*, assigned to the fourth century A.D..³³ The early medieval sources are, however, silent about this type of coastal vessels in the Konkan littorals. Inscriptions and literary sources of the early medieval period contain

³¹ R.K. Mookerji, *Indian Shipping: A History of the Sea Borne Trade and Maritime Activities of Indians from the Earliest Times*, Calcutta, 1957; Lallanji Gopal, 'The Art of Shipbuilding and Navigation in Ancient India', *Journal of Indian History*, Vol. 40, 1962, pp. 313–28; *idem.*, 'Indian Shipping in the Early Medieval Period', *India's Contribution to World Thought and Culture*, 1970, pp. 108–22, M.C. Joshi, 'Navigational Terms in the *Nāmalīṅgānūsāsana*', in S.R. Rao, ed., *Marine Archaeology*, Goa, 1991, pp. 19ff.

³² Lionel Casson, tr., *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, Princeton, 1989, p. 79, section 44.

³³ *Arigavijjā*, edited by Muni Punyavijayaji, Benares, 1957, Introduction, p. 49. B.N. Mukherjee, *Kharoshthi and Kharoshthi-Brahmi Inscriptions from West Bengal, India*, *Indian Museum*, 1990, has read the word 'trapyaga' in an inscribed terracotta sealing—palaeographically assignable to the third century A.D.—from Chandraketugarh (35 m. to the north-east of Calcutta), a leading urban centre and archaeological site of early historical times. The terracotta sealing also carries a visual representation of a ship with a longish hull and a single tripod mast at the centre. This is the earliest and so far the only known visual representation of the *trapyaka/trappaga* type of coastal vessels. A close scrutiny of the said sealing (now preserved in the Archaeological Museum, Govt. of West Bengal, Calcutta D.A.W.B. CKG 180) reveals the figure of a horse on board the ship. This is once again the earliest known evidence of the transportation of horses by ship from an Indian port. See Ranabir Chakravarti, 'Maritime Trade in Horses in Early Historical Bengal: A Seal from Chandraketugarh', *Pratnasamiksha*, Vol. I, 1992, pp. 155–161.

regular references to two types of crafts, the *pravahana* and the *vahitra* which call for a closer scrutiny.

The port of Balipattana (= Kharepatan) was visited, according to the Kharepatan plates of Rattaraja (A.D. 1008), by *pravahanas* from Kandamuliya, Cemulya and Candrapura.⁵⁴ We have already suggested that this indicated a coastal network along the Konkan littorals. It further implies that the *pravahana* type of crafts plied on the coastal routes; in other words, the *pravahana* can be taken to denote a coastal craft. One may recall here the impressions of an expanding network of coastal communications in and around A.D. 1084, linking Balipattana with more harbours along the west coast (see section VI).⁵⁵ *Pravahanas* were here too employed in this coastal linkage. The *pravahanas* figuring in two Kharepatan plates, of A.D. 1008 and A.D. 1084 respectively, seem to denote an identical type of vessel, i.e., the craft used in coastal voyages along the Konkan littorals. This suggestion gains further ground as the *pravahana* is differentiated from another type of craft, viz., the *vahitra*, in the same Kharepatan plate of A.D. 1008. The *vahitra* is said to have reached the port of Balipattana from *dvīpāntara*, a term literally meaning 'from other islands' but actually standing for overseas countries abroad. Seen from this angle, the *vahitra*, distinct from the *pravahana*, would refer to a ship used in overseas voyages and not coastal journeys.⁵⁶

The above image about coastal crafts in early medieval Konkan is admittedly hazy. The meagre textual and epigraphic data may be more intelligible if one utilises here, following Jean Deloche, the visual representations of early medieval crafts of Konkan, found on several *viragals* or hero-stones.⁵⁷ Though the vessels are shown in relevant sculptures in the

⁵⁴ *CII*, VI, pp. 183–92.

⁵⁵ *CII*, VI, pp. 115–20, lines 77–81.

⁵⁶ The term *dvīpāntara* in the sense of areas abroad/overseas is seen in the Motupalli inscription of Kākatīya Ganapati, dated 1245, edited by Hultzsch, *EI*, Vol. XII, pp. 188–97. See Chakravarti, *Rulers and Ports*, pp. 57–78. The earliest known epigraphic reference to a *vahitra* is furnished by the charter of Vīṇuṣeṇa (A.D. 592), edited by D.C. Sircar, *EI*, XXX, pp. 163–81; also, D.D. Kosambi, 'Indian Feudal Trade Charters', *JESHO*, Vol. 2, 1959, pp. 281–93. As this charter deals with the settling of a group of merchants (*vanagrāma*) at Lohātagrāma (situated near the Kathiawad coast), there is a distinct likelihood that Lohātagrāma was visited by *vahitras* from overseas areas. This possibility is strengthened by the reference to merchants returning to Lohātagrāma from abroad. The *Dasakumaracarita* of Daṇḍin (c. seventh century A.D.) too speaks of the *vahitras* of Yavanas (i.e., people of west Asiatic origin) at and around Tāmralipta, the famous port in the Bengal coast. For a relevant discussion see the unpublished report (1993–94) on the Indigenous Traditions of Navigation in the Indian Ocean (the Bengal Coast), edited by B.N. Mukherjee and Ranabir Chakravarti and submitted to the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, New Delhi.

⁵⁷ J. Deloche, 'Konkan Warships of the XIIth–XVth Centuries as Represented on Memorial Stones', *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient*, Vol. 86, (hereafter *BEFEO*), 1987, pp. 165–84; *idem*, 'Iconographic Evidence of Boat and Ship Structures in India (2nd century B.C.–15 century A.D.): A New Approach', in Himanshu Prabha Ray and Jean-François Salles, eds, *Tradition and Archaeology: Early Maritime Contacts in the Indian Ocean*, New Delhi, 1996, pp. 199–224.

context of battles, these could have been used during the time of peace as well.

The well-known panels of representations of boats in the caves at Borivli, near Bombay, call for our attention. Several lines of vessels are shown in a battle scene. These are all crafts made of planks which are stitched together (probably with coconut coir). The long projected bow and the gunwale of the sharp-ended boat are also clearly depicted. Also shown are oars which come out of the single level holes, cut below the gunwale, but only the shafts of the oars are visible. Deloche considers that there was possibly a gap of one metre between each hole and, on the basis of the number of oars visible, opines that the hull was 13–16 metres in length. The sculptures are thought to have portrayed a battle between the Śilāhāras of north Konkan and the Kadambas of Goa and are generally ascribed to the twelfth century.

A number of *viragals*, depicting sea battles, are now in the Goa Museum, which have also been studied by Deloche. One memorial stone shows a double-ended banana-shaped craft. A second variety of craft is represented by a canoe-shaped one with an axial rudder; seven rowers facing backwards are also shown to have rowed the boat. No less interesting is another *viragal* on which is carved the figure of a broad vessel with a sharp stern. That this is a sewn vessel is also clearly visible in the sculpture. Nine oar holes are shown. But the most interesting component of this vessel is a stern-post rudder which is prominently portrayed. Technologically speaking, the stern-post rudder may be considered to have marked an improvement on the axial rudder, depicted in another specimen, and also on the steering paddle. Moreover, this vessel is shown not afloat, but to have stood on three log-like cylindrical objects. The intention of the sculptor appears to have been to show a vessel being lowered into the water. If this is accepted, the figure can well be taken to depict a ship in a dockyard where it could either have been built and/or repaired. All the sculptures from Goa can be placed on stylistic grounds to the twelfth–thirteenth century. The art–historical evidence of a variety of coastal vessels from around Goa may tally well with more or less contemporary data, available from inscriptions and various texts, on the growth and development of coastal commerce in the southern part of Konkan, including Goa, from the eleventh century onwards.³ The Jewish business letter of A.D. 1145 mentioned earlier informs us that the ship which carried Judah b. Joseph Kohen from Manjraj to Tana along the Konkan coast, had a smaller boat

³ The above discussion of the visual representations of the Konkan crafts is largely based on Deloche, 'Konkan Warships'. None of the vessels is carved with the figure of a sail. It is only rarely that early Indian ships are portrayed with sails in visual art; the sail is, however, clearly shown in the paintings of ships from Ajanta. Cf. Schlingloff, *Studies in the Ajanta Paintings*, offers a thorough and elaborate discussion. Literary accounts of sailing vessels in early Indian literature, on the other hand, graphically describe the sail (*śṭāpātā* in Sanskrit and *siyapaṭa/siyavata* in Prakrit).

attached to it. In this case, at least, the smaller boat carried soldiers who probably ran away when Judah's ship was attacked by pirates somewhere in the Konkan coast.³⁹ The large ship, carrying passengers and cargo, is designated in Arabic as *jahaj* in a twelfth century Jewish letter, narrating a coastal journey from Manjrur to al Dyyb (Diu).⁴⁰

VIII

There is little doubt that the coastal crafts which plied along the Konkan coast during the early medieval times for trading purposes were themselves an important ingredient of the commerce in Konkan. A system of transport and trade in that transport were certainly an inseparable feature of the commercial activities in the coast under review. Epigraphic data, though far from being adequate, unmistakably point to the presence of a community of ship-owning merchants in early medieval Konkan. King Anantadeva of the Śilāhāra house of northern Konkan had a *mahāmātya* (a high-ranking officer), according to the Kharepatan record of A.D. 1084, named Vasaida. Vasaida is also described therein as a *nauvitaka*.⁴¹ V.V. Mirashi translates the term as 'Admiral'. 'Admiral', however, implies the appointment of a commander of a navy which the Śilāhāras did not probably raise. The term in question may more logically be emmended to *nauvittaka*, i.e., one whose wealth is associated with (hence derived from) *nau* or vessels. We have already pointed out that the term almost always stood for a ship-owner and was often interchangeable with the Arabic/Persian word, *nakhuda*. The use of these terms became common and frequent enough to require standardised abbreviations of these two terms in early medieval inscriptions from the west coast as *nau* and *nakhu*. Vasaida, thus, would appear not as an admiral of the Śilāhāras, but as a rich owner of mercantile marine at Balipattana. One cannot also lose sight of the fact that the ship-owner functioned as a powerful officer (*mahāmātya*). This combining of his commercial and administrative roles may imply that the material milieu in the coastal society accommodated such convergence of two dissimilar functions. That his wealth derived from shipping operations was instrumental for his very high administrative assignment seems distinctly likely.

Two more officers of a prestigious and senior rank are mentioned in the same Kharepatan record of A.D. 1084. They are Bhābana-śreṣṭhī and his brother Dhanama-śreṣṭhī, both being the sons of Durga-śreṣṭhī. While Durga and Bhābana were *mahāpradhānas* (chief among the heads of the

³⁹ Goitein, *Letters*, 63

⁴⁰ Goitein, 'From Aden to India', p. 53. Traditional vessels of the Konkan coast, still in use, are the *Shibadi*, *Phatemari*, *Mhangiri*, *Machva*, *Padav* or *Balav*, *Galbut*, *Ghurab*, *Toni*, *Kotia* and *Bateio*. For an account of these traditional vessels consult *GBP*, Vols X, XI, XIII, XIV, XVI; also Deloche, *Transport and Communication*, II.

⁴¹ *CII*, VI, p. 120, Inscription No. 19.

administrative departments), Dhanama was a *mahāsandhivigrahika* (officer in charge of war and peace, i.e., in the external affairs department). Here, one encounters a family of hereditary administrators whose common name-ending '*śreṣṭhī*' is a clear pointer to their commercial activities. Moreover, their *pravahanas* or coastal crafts, which touched at various ports in the Konkan, were exempted from tolls and customs by Anantadeva. The sailors manning their ships were also exempted from any cess, normally levied on the ingress and egress of sailors.⁶² The sons and grandsons of Bhabana and Dhanama—Panama, Kudukula and Maliya—were also designated as *śreṣṭhis* and entitled to enjoy the fiscal remissions granted to their father and grandfather. The record impresses upon us the importance of a family of ship-owning merchants, engaged in their business over at least three generations in the coastal society. Though they were not explicitly called *nauvittakas* and they bore the epithet *śreṣṭhī*, they were doubtless engaged in shipping business, since they owned vessels (*pravahanas*) and employed sailors (*norikakarmakaras*) too. These merchants, residing at Balipattana and functioning as ship-owners, must have amassed enough wealth to be given the epithet *śreṣṭhī*. On the other hand, Durga-śreṣṭhī and his two sons—Bhavana and Dhanama—enjoyed administrative offices as high as those of *mahāpradhāna* and *mahāsandhivigrahika*. Their financial success in the ship-owning business appears to have played a part in their being drawn into administrative circles. Their involvement in ship-owning business seems to have continued with their role as administrators. The ship-owner was certainly a very prestigious person in a coastal society; his administrative functions must have considerably enhanced his power and elite position.

Another ship-owner, named Tinbu, figures in a Jewish business letter of A.D. 1145, written by Mahruz b. Jacob to his brother-in-law, Judah b. Joseph ha-Kohen.⁶³ Mahruz was himself a *nakhuda* or a ship-owner who often plied between Aden and India and his brother-in-law a representative of merchants at the Egyptian capital. Mahruz, in this letter, was urging his brother-in-law, who had the misfortune of being attacked by pirates somewhere in the Konkan coast, to return at this earliest opportunity to Manjrur or Mangalore, where Mahruz waited, from Tana or Thana in the north Konkan coast. Tinbu seems to have been a ship-owner based at Mangalore and 'apparently a Hindu'.⁶⁴ A letter from Mahruz was sent for Judah b. Jacob through *nakhuda* Tinbu who was on his way to Tana or Thana. The emergent image from this letter is that Tinbu's shipping business spanned

⁶² CII, VI, Inscription No. 19, lines 75–81. '*Śrīmadvalipattānīya mahāpradhāna Durgasreṣṭhisulamahāpradhāna Śrī Bhabanasreṣṭhi-bhrātā mahāsandhivigrahika Śrī Dhanamasreṣṭhiṇaḥ tayoryatpravahanāni samāgacchati tasya yucchulkam norika-karmakaraṇāmapī pravete nirgamepi . . . sulkam parityaktam*'

⁶³ Göttsch, *Letters*, pp. 62–65

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 64, n. 12

from Manjrur to Tana along the Konkan littorals. Tinbu as a ship-owning merchant thus appears to have participated, like Durga-śreṣṭhī, Bhābana-śreṣṭhī, Dhanama-śreṣṭhī and their sons, in coastal voyages along Konkan. But the more important point is the impression of close ties and trust between Mahrüz and Tinbu. Tinbu was carrying not merely letters from Mahrüz, but was further asked to 'pay to my lord (i.e., Kohen) 21 *mithqals* (Egyptian *dinars*)'.⁶⁵ Mahrüz later repeats this but in a more elaborate and explicit manner: 'If, my lord, you need any gold, please take it on my account from the *nakhoda* Tinbu, for he is staying in Tana, and between him and me there are *bonds of inseparable friendship and brotherhood*' (italics mine).⁶⁶ The letter illustrates the linkages between a Jewish *nakhuda*, operating between Aden and India, and his Indian counterpart, plying with his ships in the coastal network. One can hardly miss the fact that the merchants exchanged and had access to information, without which a commercial network would collapse, cutting across their religious and ethnic affiliations. The above discussion may drive home the fact that there were Indian ship-owners and at least someone like Tinbu definitely sailed along the coast in their ships. This is contrary to the popular perception that early Indian merchants did not participate in shipping enterprises. We have, however, only very meagre data to suggest that the Indian *nauvittaka/nakhuda* participated in and competed with various Arab and Jewish ship-owners in long-distance networks across the high seas.⁶⁷

IX

A clear understanding of the commodities involved in the coastal trade in Konkan is not forthcoming from the available sources. A number of exchangeable products figure in both indigenous and foreign sources (both epigraphic and textual), but whether, and to what extent, they were associated with coastal trade and voyages in Konkan is difficult to determine. The Arab authors repeatedly refer to the fine quality of teak grown in Konkan, the indispensable raw material for boat/ship building for both coastal and overseas voyages. No less important was the regular plantation of coconut along the Konkan coast. Apart from yielding an excellent fruit,

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 64

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ A Jewish business letter of A.D. 1139 informs us about two ships—one small and another large—of Fatanswami, plying between Fandaryna in the Malabar coast and Aden. See Goitein, *Letters*, chapter V, pp. 185–92, Letter No. 38. Fatanswami is clearly the same as *pattanasvdmf*, a type of merchant figuring prominently in early medieval inscriptions from the Deccan. Another merchant, named Fadiyar, is considered by Goitein as an Indian ship-owner whose vessels plied between Malabar and Aden. The Fatanswami and Fadiyar provide us with the rather rare instances of Indian ship-owners' participation in overseas voyages in the western sector of the Indian Ocean. This has been discussed by Chakravarti, 'Maritime Trade Between Malabar and Eden', pp. 132–41.

the plant was extremely important for being the source of coir which was widely used for stitching the planks of sewn vessels of India and many other Asian countries.⁶⁶ The cultivation of paddy and oil-seeds was important enough to be recorded in some early medieval land grants from north Konkan.⁶⁷ The information about the plantation and the trade in areca nuts (*haḍapa*), particularly in the context of a littoral zone like Konkan, need not surprise us. One comes across a family of *śreṣṭhis* (rich merchants) dealing in *haḍapa* or areca nuts in southern Konkan in the Pattankudi plates of Avasara II (A.D. 1008).⁶⁸ The combined evidence of two inscriptions respectively from Kolhapur (A.D. 1136) and Miraj (A.D. 1143) points to the assemblage of various merchants at those two places during two important religious occasions when the merchants voluntarily agreed to pay cesses on diverse commercial items. The cess on eighteen kinds of grains and different types of spices (including pepper and ginger) leads to a logical inference that these products were regularly traded. Similarly, the trade in salt is evident from the epigraphic references to a levy on the sale of salt. A cess imposed on articles sold in each cloth merchant's shop would likewise imply the retail trade in textile products.⁶⁹ The most impressive list is provided by an inscription of A.D. 1204, coming from Belgaum in north Karnataka. Ancient Veṇugrāma (= modern Belgaum) witnessed a major convergence of many types of merchants from neighbouring and distant areas; their purpose was to make grants to cesses on various items in favour of Śubhacandra Bhaṭṭāraka, *ācārya* (preceptor/chief) of the Jaina shrine, Raṭṭa Jinālaya of Veṇugrāma. Transactions were made in paddy as well as husked rice, black pepper, asafoetida, green ginger, turmeric, betel leaves, areca nuts, coconuts, palm leaves, grass, sugarcane, coarse sugar, plantains and myrobalans. Trade in cotton and finished cloth and parcels of perfumery is also mentioned therein.⁷⁰ While the above accounts underline the impressive range of commodities transacted at various centres in the

⁶⁶ The Konkan coast was one of the earliest known areas in India to have had regular coconut plantations. The village Nanamgola (= Nargol near Sanjan in Thana district, Maharashtra), according to the Nasik inscription of Nahapana, year 41, was noted for the plantation of no less than 32,000 coconut saplings (*grame Nanamgole dvatrisatanaligeramulasahasra*). That this was neither an exceptional nor an isolated instance is clearly seen in the description of the plantation of 8,000 coconut saplings at Cikhlapadaka in the district of Kapura, located at the village Chikhalada near Kapura in the Baroda district, Gujarat, according to the Nasik inscription of Nahapana, dated years 41, 42, 45 (*Kapurahare ca game Cikhlapadare dattani naligerani mulasahasrani atha 8000*). For the relevant texts see D.C. Sircar, *SI*, I, Calcutta, 1965, pp. 164–67.

⁶⁷ This is discussed in Chakravarti, 'Monarchs, Merchants and Matha', pp. 189–208.

⁶⁸ *CII*, VI, 178–83, Inscription No. 40, especially lines pp. 35–38.

⁶⁹ *CII*, VI, p. 235, lines 26–32 and 245, lines 22–29.

⁷⁰ B.D. Chattopadhyaya, 'Urban centres in Early Medieval India: An Overview', in Sabyasachi Bhattacharyya and Romila Thapar, eds, *Situating Indian History for S. Gopal*, Delhi, 1987, pp. 8–33.

Konkan coast and the adjoining hinterland, there is little direct proof to show that these were transported by coastal crafts. On the other hand, the image of a brisk coastal network in Konkan cannot but accommodate the possibilities of these items being transported along the coast by the prevalent network in the western seaboard. A twelfth century Jewish business letter, describing a coastal voyage from Manjrur or Mangalore to al Dyyb, i.e., Diu in south Kathiawad, informs us about the shipment of pepper, iron, ginger, coir, fine aloes wood and coconut.⁷³ Barring the first two items, the other products are known to have been available and transacted in Konkan. The more significant point is the regularity of trade, both coastal and inland, in staples and daily necessities, including different types of agrarian products in Konkan.

The monetary scenario may not, however, correspond exactly to the above information on the brisk trade and movement of commodities in the littorals under review. The actual specimens of minted metallic pieces are not numerous after A.D. 750 and become more regular in the post-1000 A.D. times. There are, on the other hand, frequent references to coin terms in epigraphic records and occasional mention of cash donations to some religious establishments. The relative lack of minted metallic pieces from the middle of the eighth to the end of the tenth century has often been diagnosed as a symptom of 'monetary anaemia' and languishing trade in the overall context of early medieval India.⁷⁴ It is true that the Rāṣṭrakūṭas, the most formidable power in the Deccan from A.D. 754 to A.D. 973, did not have a definite dynastic coinage. But an inscription during the reign of Amoghavarṣa makes explicit mention of the perpetual deposit in cash to a monastery at Kanheri. At Sanjan, a well-known port in north Konkan, a money merchant (*śreṣṭhī-sārtha*) Gambhuka, is said to have minted *drammas* or silver coins during the time of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa ruler Kṛṣṇa III (A.D. 939-67).⁷⁵ The term *dramma*, meaning a silver coin, appears in inscriptions quite frequently. In the context of south India and the Deccan, the *dramma* is likely to have denoted a foreign, especially Arabic, coin. The actual specimen of a silver coin in early medieval Deccan is extremely rare and the same may be said of the copper coins. Chittaraja, the Śilāhāra ruler of north Konkan did issue a silver coin, which was based on the silver coins of the *gadhiya paisa* type, the latter in circulation in the Deccan till at

⁷³ Goitein, 'From Aden to India'

⁷⁴ The perception of a decline in the crafts, commercial activities and urban centres during the early medieval times portrays the emergence of a self-sufficient and enclosed village economy which is located in the advent and crystallisation of the feudal social formation in India. See D D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, Bombay, 1956; Sharma, *Indian Feudalism*, *ibid*, *Urban Decay in India A.D. 300-1000*, Delhi, 1987; Yadava, *Society and Culture*; Jha, ed., *Feudal Social Formation*, to name only the most representative works on Indian feudalism.

⁷⁵ Chakravarti, 'Monarchs, Merchants and Matha'.

least the middle of the eleventh century.⁷⁶ Actual specimens of gold coins, issued by the Western Cālukyas, the Kalacuris and the Kadambas, appear from the eleventh century onwards and are generally known as *gadyanaka*. 'The weight standard followed in the coins of the Goa Kadambas', according to Chattopadhyaya, 'was entirely different from the standard adopted in the main Karnataka region'.⁷⁷ One is, however, not sure whether the situation in this region would conform to the north Indian (and especially eastern Indian) pattern of a three-tier monetary system consisting of the cowry-shell at the base, the silver/gold coins at the top and the 'dust currency' in between the two.⁷⁸ Even if one acquiesces to the image of a relatively lesser use of the minted metallic pieces in commercial transactions, this may not readily lead to the impression of a dwindling trade, as the coin was after all one of the different media of exchange. The actual specimens of gold coins of local Konkani rulers (eleventh to fourteenth centuries A.D.), the regular mention of coin terms in inscriptions and the occasional reference to the monetary system in Arabic accounts⁷⁹ tend to converge with the image of an unhindered movement of merchants and merchandise along the Konkan coast; in other words, the dominant historiographical stance of the decline of trade—especially seaborne trade—in India during the early middle ages does not match our observations of the coastal commerce in Konkan from the seventh century to the close of the fourteenth century.

X

The foregoing study of the coastal trade and voyages in Konkan may not offer enough exciting anecdotes and dramatic actions, typically associated with narratives of seaborne commerce. The risks, the uncertainties and the

⁷⁶ B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *Coins and Currency Systems in South India A.D. 225–1300*, Delhi, 1977, pp. 130–31, 142.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

⁷⁸ B.N. Mukherjee, *Media of Exchange in Early Medieval North India*, Delhi, 1992. In several Arab accounts of the country of Juzr (i.e., the Gurjara-Pratihara kingdom), not far away from the Deccan and the Konkan coast, figures the use of silver and gold dust as a medium of exchange. The widely held notion that cowry shells as a medium of exchange were restrictive of long-distance trade, and, at the most, suggested some barter-like exchanges, is also open to doubt. The best quality cowry shells were brought to the subcontinent from the Maldives. This itself speaks of an impressive overseas maritime network. Ibn Battuta and Mahuan point out that the Maldivian cowry shells were brought overseas to Bengal as ballast in ships and Bengal sent, in return, rice to Maldives; J. Heiman, 'Small Exchange and Ballast: Cowry Trade and Usage as an example of Indian Ocean Economic History', *South Asia*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1980, pp. 48–69.

⁷⁹ The perception of the early medieval economy where money was reduced to marginalia does not stand scrutiny in the light of the recent studies of the monetary history of north India by John S. Deyell, *Living Without Silver*, Delhi, 1990.

spirit of adventures invariably accompanying long-distance high sea voyages have a counterpoint in the relatively more sedate, less flamboyant and safer journeys along the coast. The strength and vitality of coastal networks lie in the ability to hold their own in the face of the boom and slump in the overseas commerce. Moreover, the coastal networks, converging often at a premier port, were indispensable for the very sustenance of long-distance trade. An unmistakable element of continuity in the coastal commerce in Konkan can be seen in the active role of a few harbours from the early historical times onwards. The pattern of navigation along the coast would also generally remain unaltered, since it was largely shaped by natural factors, e.g., the alteration of the monsoons, the sea currents and the facilities of anchorage. Another facet of the tendencies to invariance in the affairs of coastal Konkan can be seen in the piratical activities. Right from the early historical times down to close of the period of our survey the Konkan coast, more so its southern part, earned notoriety in the accounts of merchants, geographers and shippers alike. If the classical authors knew this littoral as Andron Peiraton, more or less similar must have been the experience of Judah b. Cohen during his coastal voyage from Manjrur to Tana and Baruj. At the turn of the thirteenth century, Marco Polo reported rampant piracy around Tana or Thana and, moreover, the connivance between corsairs and the local political power at Thana.²⁰

But the possibilities of some shifts and alterations even within the overall sedate nature of commerce in the Konkan coast cannot be ruled out. The early medieval period witnessed the prominence of two ports, which had not attained pre-eminence in the early historical times. These are Sindan or Sanjan and Tana or Thana, both in the north Konkan coast. On the other hand, Kalyāṇa (known as Kalliena in the Classical texts) near Bombay, a well-known port since at least the later part of the first century A.D. seems to have gradually faded out from the coastal network in Konkan during the early middle ages.

Indian literary and epigraphic data and non-indigenous evidence too throw light on the coastal communications and commerce in the northern part of the coast than in its southern segment. It is quite apparent that the harbours of north Konkan, having both coastal and overseas networks, were more prosperous and prominent than their southern counterparts which depended primarily on the coastal linkages. The southern Konkan littorals began to gain some economic prominence from the eleventh century onwards. The rise of Balipattana and Sindabur/Candrapura (around Goa) to importance particularly since A.D. 1000, paved the way for brisker, more extensive and regular trade linkages between the southern and northern segments of Konkan, between the Malabar and the Konkan

²⁰ Chakravarti, 'Horse Trade and Piracy at Tana'.

littorals and between southern Konkan and the Gujarat-Kathiawad sea-boards. That the southern Konkan coast made its presence felt in matters of seafaring in the Konkan coast from A.D. 1000 onwards is further illustrated by the references to its ports, especially Goa (Juwah-Sindabur), along with their respective landmarks, in the celebrated navigational text of Ibn Majid. But even this growth in the coastal network and trade in Konkan in the early medieval period was not sufficient to outshine the harbours and seafaring in the Gujarat and Malabar coasts. Ibn Majid, in the latter half of the fifteenth century of course, paid attention to movements of vessels and to flourishing ports in Konkan, but these look pale and drab against his exhaustive and precise accounts of seafaring and ports in the Gujarat and Malabar littorals.

Commercialisation of forests, environmental negligence and alienation of tribal rights in Madras Presidency: 1792–1882

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The colonial policy on forests and forest-dwellers during the early nineteenth century has not been explored extensively, and has not been placed under scrutiny.¹ Studies so far have mainly focused on how the Forest Acts progressively curtailed the rights of forest-dwellers but failed to assess the direct impact on their economy/rights.² However, some studies attempted to give a bird's-eye view of the impact of the Forest Acts on the different categories of population.³ But they were centred on areas other than the Madras Presidency.⁴

Further, the colonial forest policy on environment for the early nineteenth century has not been explored, and the studies are focused on the period

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¹ Ramachandra Guha, 'Forest in British and Post-British India: A Historical Analysis', *Economic and Political Weekly* (hereafter *EPW*), Vol. 18(44), 29 October 1983, pp. 1882–96; *idem*, 'Forest in British and Post-British India: A Historical Analysis', *EPW*, Vol. 18(45–46), November 5–12, 1983, pp. 1940–47; Mahesh Rangarajan, 'Imperial agendas and India's forests: The early history of Indian Forestry, 1800–1878', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* (hereafter *IESHR*), Vol. 31(2), 1994, pp. 147–67.

² *Ibid*

³ Ramachandra Guha and Madhav Gadgil, 'State Forest and Social Conflict in British India', *Past and Present*, No. 122, February 1989, pp. 141–77.

⁴ David Baker, 'State Policy, the Market Economy, and Tribal decline: the Central Provinces, 1861–1920', *IESHR*, Vol. 28(4), 1991, pp. 341–70.

immediately after the first Forest Act 1865. Guha argued that the 1865 Act had been enacted mainly to ensure control over the forest supply for railways, and environmental issues had been neglected by not enforcing the rules. While drafting the Forest Act 1878, the debate on environment had taken place among the Forest Department officials at the centre and presidency level. At the central level, the emphasis was on controlling the forest by the state, whereas at the presidency level, particularly in Madras, the district administrators, while opposing the central views, wanted the needs of the local people to be considered. Ultimately, the presidency level protest was suppressed by the colonial administration.⁵ According to Guha, the debate on environment had taken place within the Forest Department while drafting the Forest Act 1878.

Grove has argued that the debate on environment had taken place among the British colonial surgeons during the early colonial period. His claims are based mainly on private papers, published records and imperial level archives were that the British colonial surgeons have discussed the issues arising out of deforestation and its consequences on climate, rainfall decline, water supply, drought, famine, etc. Further, they apprehended that 'headwaters of rivers watering the fertile . . . lowlands of the presidency would clearly be affected'. He concluded, therefore, that the idea of forest conservation for environmental protection was strongly shaped, particularly after the 1830s, both in the Madras and Bombay Presidencies in 1856: 'the basic infrastructure of state forest conservation was in place in all presidencies as well as elsewhere in India'.⁶ Whether his claims were reflected in practice in the Madras Presidency has to be ascertained with the help of presidency level archival sources. During the early nineteenth century, whether any importance was accorded for maintaining ecological balance and environmental protection or only a crass commercial forest policy was followed is of great importance.

The colonial government claimed that the forests were destroyed mainly by the forest-dwellers, and hence it had to restrict the tribal rights over forests including their right over common property resources. Is this true? Has not any other factor led to the denudation of forests? Has the colonial administration really emphasised forest conservation or was it more interested in commercialisation of the forests? While restricting tribal rights on forests, has any measure for their development been initiated by the British during the nineteenth century? Towards answering these queries, Salem and Baramahal region has been chosen, as it had the largest forest cover and forest-dwellers in the whole of Madras Presidency.

⁵ Ramachandra Guha, 'An early environmental debate: The making of the 1878 forest act', *IESHR*, Vol 27(1), 1990, pp. 65-84.

⁶ Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism. Colonial expansion, tropical island Edens and the origins of environmentalism 1600-1860*, Delhi, 1995, pp. 380-473.

Salem and Baramahal regions lie between north latitude 11° 14' 46" and 120° 53' 30" and between east longitude 77° 30' 52" and 78° 53' 05". In 1793, the total geographical area of Salem and Baramahal regions was 6,391 square miles, of which 4,997 square miles (78.19 per cent) were plains and 1,394 square miles (21.81 per cent) hills. The total number of villages was 6,041 of which 435 were classified as hill villages. The total extent of agricultural land was 4,090,268.2 acres. The number of irrigation sources were: 495 wells, 397 annicuts and 2,345 tanks.⁷ There were 12 minor rivers which mostly originated from the hills and flowed for about 497 miles.⁸ In 1796, the total number of cattle resources were 567,641 and 566,625 sheep.⁹ In addition, a number of plant species and fauna were found in Salem and Baramahal regions, particularly in the hill areas. There were several important trees viz., sandalwood, teak, vengay, kadukai, velvelam, avaram, tamarind, naga and karangali, besides several medicinal plants in the hills.¹⁰ As far as the climate was concerned, summer starts in February and it continues till the later part of June, and then, from November onwards the winter begins, and continues till late February.¹¹

In 1793, the total population of Salem and Baramahal regions were about 600,000 of which 27,713 persons or 4.62 per cent lived in the hills. Population density per mile was 2,528 and this rate was 3,159 for the plains and only 174 for the hills.¹²

In Madras Presidency, neither conservation was emphasised nor the tribals' access to forests was restricted during the pre-colonial as well as the early colonial period. In the 1830s, the tribal land and forest of Shervaroy hills were taken for coffee cultivation and, subsequently, several restrictions were imposed on the customary use of the forest. No other hill tribes have met with such problems in the Madras Presidency. Until 1882, the colonial government did not have a concrete forest policy for the Madras Presidency as a whole. In most parts of Madras Presidency, forest cover was invariably destroyed by the contractors, traditional industries, neighbourhood towns and villages until the early colonial period.¹³ With these pre- and early colonial factors, establishment of the British iron-making industries, Madras Railways and introduction of commercial crops into the hill areas,

⁷ Board of Revenue (hereafter BOR), Misc. Vol. 151-A, 1791-94, pp. 41-42, Tamil Nadu State Archives, Chennai (hereafter TNSA).

⁸ Colonel Alexander Read, *General Report on Salem*, 4 April 1800, para 11. TNSA.

⁹ R.K. Puckle (Epitomised and Annotated), *Colonel Read's Report on the original settlement of Salem in 1791-1796*, Salem, 1868, p. 98. See also BOR, Misc. Vol. 157, 20 March 1798, TNSA.

¹⁰ Dietrich Brandis, *Suggestions Regarding Forest Administration in the Madras Presidency*, Madras, 1883, pp. 173-75.

¹¹ Baramahal Records (hereafter BR), Section II, *Geography, 1791-1794*, Vol. 1, p. 32, TNSA.

¹² BR, Section III, *Inhabitants*, Vol. 1. pp. iii & iv, TNSA.

¹³ Brandis, *Suggestions Regarding Forest Administration*, Chapters II, III and IX.

large extent of prime forests were destroyed. In the early nineteenth century, conservation of forests was completely neglected by the colonial government. The second-half of the nineteenth century witnessed a little importance being given for conservation, that too, mainly for supplying fuel-wood for the Madras Railways and British iron-making industries. Without considering the factors responsible for the denudation, the colonial state imposed several restrictions on the tribals' traditional rights without initiating any measure for their development/welfare in the Salem and Baramahal region.¹⁴ Whenever the tribals revolted against the appropriation of their rights, they were suppressed by the colonial military power.¹⁵

This article attempts to analyse commercialisation following the colonial Forest Policy and the alienation of tribal rights on forests in the hill areas of Salem and Baramahal region of the Madras Presidency in the period between colonial intervention (1792) and introduction of the Madras Forest Act 1882. It consists of nine sections. The first section deals with the destruction of forests in general and the colonial policy. The second section analyses the denudation of sandalwood in particular and the colonial commercial policy. The third section gives an account of the indiscriminate felling by the Indian indigenous and British iron-making industries. The fourth section is on the establishment of Madras Railways and destruction of forests. The fifth section concentrates on the destruction of forests by the plain neighbourhood towns and villages. The sixth section looks at introduction of commercial crops which lead to clearing of vast tracts of forest cover. The seventh section focuses on the restrictions imposed on the tribals by the Madras Forest Act. The eighth section discusses the impact of the introduction of commercial crops and the Madras Forest Act on the tribals. The last section provides the concluding observations of this article.

I

Early Colonial Forest Policy

The colonial rulers had neglected the forests and their conservation during their early period.¹⁶ They did not have a concrete forest policy till the sixth decade of the nineteenth century. Instead of maintaining ecological balance and protecting the environment by preserving forest resources, they leased

¹⁴ For details see V. Saravanan, 'Tribal Welfare and Colonial Policy in Salem and Baramahal Regions of Madras Presidency During the Colonial Period: 1792-1947' (unpublished).

¹⁵ For details, see V. Saravanan, 'Tribal Revolts in Salem and Baramahal Regions of Madras Presidency During the Late Eighteenth Century' (unpublished).

¹⁶ K. Indhrani, *The Forest Policy and Administration of the Madras Presidency under Crown 1858-1935*, unpublished Ph.D dissertation, Department of History, University of Madras, Madras, 1982, p. 238

them out for a meagre amount. Till 1835, they levied a duty on woodcutting in the different parts viz., Denkanekota and Namakkal of Salem district. Forest and forest produce were used without any constraint by paying a little amount both by the hill people as well as those from the plains. Woodcutting rights were not rented/leased out till 1835 in the Salem and Baramahal region. The Collector of Salem states, '... the right of cutting wood has never been hitherto rented in this district'.¹⁷ It was, therefore, left to the commonsense and economic compulsion of the people to protect their own interests.

In addition to the utilisation of forests by the locals and neighbours, the British Iron and Steel Company was accountable to a great extent for the annihilation of forest cover in the different parts of Madras Presidency. Prior to 1835, the Iron and Steel Company got a lease of woodcutting rights from five taluks (Chidambaram, Virudachallam, Cuddalore, Elavanasoor and Bhuvanagherry) in South Arcot district; three taluks (Wodiarpolliam, Aragalore and Voleondapooram) in Trichinopoly district and one taluk (Sheally) in Tanjore district.¹⁸ Privileges were given to entertain the forest resources in favour of the companies without considering the importance of protecting natural resources.

To extract more revenue, a separate system of leasing was followed for the different forest products since 1834. There was a separate renting system for sandalwood (see section II) and other forest products. In Salem district, some parts of the jungles were rented by the natives for cutting bamboos and other timber; in some other areas the right of cutting sandalwood had been rented.¹⁹ Kolli hills of Salem district were rented out, for the exclusive right to levying a duty on woodcutting for timber and bamboos, at Rs 78 per annum. In 1835, Heath proposed to take the lease of Kolli hills for a period of 21 years and, if approved by the Court of Directors, for 20 more years.²⁰ For the first five years, he offered it at the rate of Rs 156 per annum. During the second and third five-years, he proposed to take over the whole district at the rate of Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 per annum respectively; and for the subsequent period of six years, the rent was at the rate of Rs 1,500. On renewal, he offered to pay at the rate of Rs 2,000 per annum for the entire lease period.²¹ But the Collector refused to accept Heath's offer to obtain monopoly rights of cutting wood in Salem district on the ground that it would produce great public inconvenience as '... it would not only interfere with the supply of the country furnaces and other manufacturers

¹⁷ BOR, 21 November 1835, Vol. 1468, p. 10792, TNSA.

¹⁸ Letter from the Secretary to the Chief Secretary to the Government, dated 8 October 1835, BOR, Vol. 1470, p. 11536, TNSA.

¹⁹ Letter from Heath to BOR, dated 2 September 1835, BOR, Vol. 1467, p. 10500, TNSA.

²⁰ BOR, Vol. 1468, 21 September 1835, p. 10792, TNSA.

²¹ Letter from Heath to the Collector of Salem, dated 9 February 1835, BOR, Vol. 1468, p. 10794, TNSA.

requiring machinery now existing or which may be established, but it would completely put a stop to the preparation (except by Mr Heath) of that useful article, magnesia cement, for which large quantities of charcoal are required, and which bids fair soon to become a valuable article of export from the district'.²² He further stated that the right of levying a duty on cutting wood had already been rented out in two taluks, i.e., Denken-cottah and Namakkal.²³ In addition, the Collector had earlier called a separate lease for sandalwood cutting rights for the different hills. Consequently, the Collector opined to give monopoly rights for cutting wood except for those hill ranges with sandalwood which existed in six taluks viz., Attur, Namakkal, Salem, Denken-cottah, Tripatoor and Tengrakotta of the total 14 taluks.²⁴

In the same year, Heath applied to the Board of Revenue for a grant of exclusive right of cutting wood for fuel for the use of the Iron and Steel Company from the government wastelands and jungles of the Salem district for a period of 21 years. He assured that the existing rights of the natives and the revenue sources of the government would not be disturbed. Also, he offered to pay two annas per 128 cubic feet quantity of fuel-wood.²⁵ Based on the Collector's recommendation, the government ordered 'not to permit fuel to be cut in the government woodlands of his district for the use of iron works on the European plan, except those belonging to the Indian Iron and Steel Company'.²⁶ Between 1858-59 and 1875-76, Rs 8,29,134 were received from the forest sources other than sandalwood in Salem district.²⁷ This indicated that the tribals did not destroy the forest as the government had encouraged felling by traders and contractors for a meagre amount.

II

Colonial Policy on Sandalwood

Sandalwood had been preserved and utilised only by the rulers during the pre-colonial period. For example, Tipu Sultan had preserved the sandalwood in the hills of Dhanaiguncottah for more than 10 years while using the buildings. And it was guarded by about 200 peons. Immediately after colonial intervention, these trees were entirely cut down by a body of

²² Letter from the Collector of Salem to the BOR, dated 12 September 1835, BOR, Vol. 1468, p. 10791, TNSA.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 10792.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10790.

²⁵ Letter from Heath to BOR, dated 2 September 1835, BOR, Vol. 1467, pp. 1499-1501, TNSA.

²⁶ Minutes of Consultations, dated 27 October 1835, BOR, TNSA.

²⁷ Board Proceedings (hereafter BP) No. 996, 3 March 1877, TNSA.

armed Nairs of Calicut. Later, the colonial government prohibited felling of sandalwood in all the mountains. But the intention was not to preserve but to extract more revenue in future.²¹

Sandalwood in Salem district was cut down not only by the neighbourhood merchants/inhabitants but also by merchants from distant places like Tanjore. One such group led by a Brahman, a native of Tanjore had cut down and carried away 1,000 pags via the Gujelguttu pass; but this was seized and sent to Madras for being exported to China.²² With a view to tap the Chinese market, which the government considered as important, it took some steps to preserve sandalwood in the forests.²³

After colonial intervention, the demand for sandalwood increased not only within India but also in foreign countries, especially in China. In fact, the price of sandalwood was determined by the Chinese market demand.²⁴ While middlemen were encouraged, the official machinery was also used to hew sandalwood from the different parts of the Madras Presidency.

Sandalwood was largely found in the hills and forests of the north-western parts of the Madras Presidency viz., Salem and Baramahal, Coimbatore and South Canara regions. In 1800, British middlemen sought permission to purchase/procure sandalwood from the above mentioned regions to export it to China. Accepting the proposal, the government gave the instruction for purchase of sandalwood being entirely open in Mysore and Canara regions. It also recommended that the place of sandalwood purchase should be within the Company's territory.²⁵ In response, the middlemen also assured, '... the terms of purchase can be settled on the arrival of the sandalwood, having every reliance on the liberality of the Board in the settlement ... the first sort of sandalwood should be free from any marks and the larger the pieces the better'.²⁶ Consequently, the government sent a communication to the Collector to inform the agent regarding the amount of sandalwood that was ready for cutting, charges of carriage to Madras, different kinds of quantity and the amount of quantity readily available at hand.²⁷

Favouring the agents, the government instructed Collectors regarding the sandalwood cutting: '... the larger and heavier the pieces are the

²¹ Letter from the Collector of Salem to the BOR, dated 19 February 1800, BOR, Vol. 247, p. 1955, TNSA.

²² Letter from the Collector of Salem to the BOR, dated 21 April 1800, BOR, Vol. 250, p. 3742, TNSA.

²³ Letter from the Collector of Salem to the BOR, dated 28 April 1800, BOR, Vol. 250, p. 3742, TNSA.

²⁴ H.R. Morgan, *Forestry in Southern India*, ed. John Shortt, Madras, 1884, pp. 30-31.

²⁵ Letter from the Secretary, BOR to G.M. Baboon, 17 May 1800, Salem Collectorate Records (hereafter SCR), Vol. 560, p. 26, TNSA.

²⁶ Letter from G.M. Baboon to the Secretary, BOR, 13 June 1800, SCR, Vol. 560, p. 25, TNSA.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

better they (agent) are calculated for the market, . . . it also will save the wastage and expense of cutting, and can be more conveniently packed upon the backs of the bullocks for the purpose of conveying it to Madras'.³⁵ The Collectors were directed that the sandalwood pieces were to be cut into three feet long pieces and the roots in small sizes.³⁶ The government also invited 'one Candy of several sorts (of sandalwood) and . . . specify the probable proportion of each'.³⁷ To collect and export sandalwood to China, Collectors were instructed not to interrupt the bullock cartload. In 1812, the Board of Trade requested the Board of Revenue to give instructions to the Collectors for transmitting 600 candies of sandalwood from Canara.³⁸ It also decided to advertise purchase of sandalwood.³⁹ Later, in 1836, advertisements were made in the newspapers for attracting sandalwood supply.⁴⁰ Thus, the colonial government provided privileges and necessary facilities to the middlemen for exporting sandalwood to China.

The colonial government had received a large amount of money through sandalwood export to China. For example, in 1800–1801, about 3,776–30–48 star pagodas was received by the Collector of Salem for sandalwood supply to the Board of Trade.⁴¹ From Coimbatore district, 62,984–11¾ mounds or 3,144–11¾ candies of sandalwood were delivered to the Board of Trade between 1799 and 1809, and it was worth 104,915 star pagodas 9 fanams 8 cash.⁴² The Collector also ensured supply of a probable quantity of 2,537 mounds from 3,214 trees for the year 1810. For the years 1817–1820, 6,817 mounds of sandalwood was supplied from the 8,691 trees.⁴³ A large quantity of sandalwood was auctioned in Coimbatore district. The revenue from sandalwood progressively increased: Rs 3,826–13–3 in 1834; Rs 15,063–8–9 in 1835; and Rs 22,554–1–1 in 1836.

Even after the permanent settlement (1802–03) the colonial government reserved the right to collect the woodcutting tax against the *mittadar*. For example, in the Sanklydroog, the government rented out woodcutting rights for three years at the rate of 205 star pagodas per annum, exclusive

³⁵ Letter from the BOR to Collector of Salem, 19 November 1800, SCR, Vol. 560, p. 133, TNSA.

³⁶ Letter from the Collector of Salem to the BOR, dated 3 December 1800, BOR, Vol. 268, p. 10284, TNSA.

³⁷ Letter from the BOR to the Collector of Salem, dated 19 November 1800, SCR, Vol. 560, pp. 133–34, TNSA.

³⁸ Letter from the Secretary to the Board of Trade to the Secretary, BOR, dated 20 August 1812, BOR, Vol. 582, pp. 10084–85, TNSA.

³⁹ BOR, Vol. 261, dated 29 August 1800, p. 7400, TNSA.

⁴⁰ Letter from the Marine Board Office to the Secretary to the BOR, dated 16 January 1836, BOR, Vol. 1490, p. 269, TNSA.

⁴¹ Letter from BOR to the Collector of Salem, 6 July 1801, TNSA.

⁴² Letter from the Collector of Coimbatore to the President and Members of the BOR, dated 15 June 1811, BOR, Vol. 544, p. 5938, TNSA.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 5940.

of the permanent settlement amount.⁴⁴ In July 1800, the Salem District Collector transported 309 mounds consisting 1,743 pieces to the Board of Trade. Of this, 165 mounds had been cut within a month from the forest, 117 mounds were from the different villages and 27 mounds recovered from those who clandestinely plundered from the jungle.⁴⁵ Sandalwood was found in big sizes in Salem and Baramahal region. For instance, 165 mounds of good sandalwood was produced from 40 trees. In other words, four mounds of good sandalwood was derived from each tree. According to the Collector, 200–400 candies could be supplied annually from Salem district.⁴⁶ The price of the sandalwood per candy was between 18 and 20 star pagodas. By and large, the commercial forest policy was the root cause for the destruction of sandalwood in the Salem and Baramahal region during the early nineteenth century.

Sandalwood was sold directly by the Collector in the region during the early nineteenth century. The rights to cut down sandalwood were not leased/rented out to private contractors. In the latter period, only some parts were rented out. As such, the Denkencottah jungles were leased out for every three or four years for Rs 400 in 1821; Rs 2,100 in 1822; Rs 2,100 in 1823; Rs 2,000 in 1832 and 1833.⁴⁷ In the other parts of the district, sandalwood cutting rights were under the control of the Collector. But, sandalwood was cut down without restraint by the plains people. These sandalwood trees were '... clandestinely sold at a considerable extent in bazaars of Salem, Namakkal and Attur'.⁴⁸ In addition to the colonial commercial forest policy, the merchants and neighbourhood plains people were also responsible for the destruction of sandalwood in the Salem and Baramahal region.

The Collector gave a proclamation prohibiting felling sandalwood on 25 June 1835. He sent a direct communication to all the principal merchants and also announced this through beating of tom-toms throughout the villages in Salem taluk.⁴⁹ Accordingly, plains people were not allowed to cut down sandalwood from the hills/forests and at the same time the merchants were to refrain from buying it. In spite of this, the merchants purchased about 18 mounds of sandalwood. The Collector imposed some penalty to prevent clandestine sale in future.⁵⁰ In the Tengrikota taluk, about 100 mounds of sandalwood was seized. As a measure to avoid all

⁴⁴ Letter from the Collector of Salem to the BOR, dated 6 September 1806, SCR, Vol. 3159, p. 83, TNSA.

⁴⁵ Letter from the Collector of Salem to the BOR, no date, July 1800, BOR, Vol. 258, p. 6641, TNSA.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6642.

⁴⁷ BOR, Vol. 1498, No. 24, 28th March 1836, p. 5077, TNSA.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ BOR, Vol. 1553, 24 July 1837, p. 91, TNSA.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

these illicit fellings, the government proposed to rent out sandalwood in the Salem district as a whole. Two persons were appointed to ascertain the quantity of sandalwood in Salem, Attur and Namakkal taluks.⁵¹ The intention behind this was to earn more revenue through leasing out sandalwood cutting rights and conservation was never a concern of the colonial administration.

Sandalwood in the Hills

Sandalwood was abundant in the hill areas of Salem and Baramahal region (see Table 1) and no revenue was obtained from the Shervaroy, Kolli and Pachamalai hills between 1820 and 1835. In 1830, only Rs 280 was collected from the Attur taluk.⁵² Felling was absent in many hills except Kolli and Chitteri hills where only a few trees were cut down. It categorically shows that the tribals were not behind the destruction of sandalwood in the hill areas. Expecting a large amount of revenue, a separate renting auction was publicly invited by the Collector in 1835. Only two offers were made to have exclusive rights for cutting sandalwood at the rate of Rs 300 and 340 respectively. The former wanted the lease for 15 years and the latter for eight years. Not satisfied, the government refused to lease out for this paltry amount for a period of 10 or 15 years.⁵³ Again, the Collector urged the government to lease out the hills to prevent illicit felling of sandalwood in the extensive forest of the Kolli hills.⁵⁴ It evidences that the government did not emphasise the conservation of forests.

In 1835, the Collector invited proposals to lease out sandalwood cutting rights in Shervaroy hills. The offer came for 10 years at the rate of Rs 300 per annum. But the government refused to accept it. Consequently, a new proposal was invited in 1836, and the offer was Rs 340 per annum for 5 years.⁵⁵ The Collector urged the government to accept the offer, failing which no revenue for sandalwood would be received from the hills.⁵⁶

Accepting his recommendation, the government ordered to appoint two persons to ascertain the quantity of sandalwood in the different hills and paid them Rs 30 each for two months.⁵⁷ Finally, sandalwood cutting rights

⁵¹ BOR, Vol. 1505, 26 May 1836, p. 7467, TNSA.

⁵² Letter from the Collector to the BOR, dated 20 August 1835, BOR, Vol. 1463, p. 8901, TNSA.

⁵³ Letter from Fischer to the Collector of Salem, dated 30 July 1835, BOR, Vol. 1463, p. 8903, TNSA.

⁵⁴ Letter from the Revenue Board Office to the Chief Secretary to the Government, dated 28 April 1836, BOR, Vol. 1501, p. 6539, TNSA.

⁵⁵ Letter from the Collector of Salem to the BOR, dated 18 February 1836, BOR, Vol. 1494, pp. 4018-19, TNSA.

⁵⁶ Letter from the Collector of Salem to the BOR, dated 28 March 1836, BOR, Vol. 1498, pp. 5076-78, TNSA.

⁵⁷ Letter from the BOR office to the Chief Secretary to the Government, dated 26 May 1836, BOR, Vol. 1505, p. 7467, TNSA.

Table 1
Numbers of Sandalwood in Different Hills of Salem District: 1837

Hills	I sort	II sort	III sort	Trees cut down and shootng cut	Young Trees	Total
Shervaroys	1,190	4,373	5,365	—	2,081	13,009
Neiyamalai	1	15	4	—	—	20
Aranuthumalai	10	508	941	—	1,317	2,776
Pachamalai	2,575	3,145	2,830	—	2,942	11,492
Chitteri	316	1,535	2,603	41	—	4,495
Kollimalai (Namakkal)	240	888	6,201	92	6,065	13,486

Source: Board of Revenue, Vol 1587, 11 December 1837, pp. 15047–56, Tamil Nadu State Archives.

in Kolli hills was leased out at the rate of Rs 340 for 8 years. Between 1862–63 and 1875–76, Rs 147,537 was received from sandalwood in Salem division Forest Department.³⁸

III

Indigenous and Company Industries

The indigenous industries viz., iron-smelting and sugar-boiling industries dependent on forests for fuelwood to some extent, were responsible for the denudation of green cover in the different districts of Madras Presidency during the pre- and early colonial period. Absence of coal in the Madras Presidency made these industries completely dependent on the forests for their fuel needs.

Iron-beds were largely found in Salem and according to the Geological Survey of India, there are five groups viz., Kanjamalai, Kodumalai, Singapatti, Thalamalai–Kollimalai and Thirtamalai groups.³⁹ Indigenous iron-smelting furnaces were found in many villages of the district. According to Brandis (1883), 10 villages in Attur taluk, 33 in Salem taluk and many villages in the Namakkal and Uttankarai taluks were engaged in iron-smelting works.⁴⁰ These industries were also to some extent responsible for the destruction of forest in the hill areas of Salem and Baramahal region during the pre- and early colonial periods.

Colonial intervention saw the closure of the iron-smelting industries in places where they were unable to face the competition of iron from England and the gradually increasing scarcity of fuel-wood which had led

³⁸ BP, No. 996, 3 March 1877, TNSA.

³⁹ H. LeFanu, *A Manual of the Salem District in the Presidency of Madras*, Vol. I, Madras, 1883, p. 98.

⁴⁰ Brandis, *Suggestions Regarding Forest Administration*, p. 182.

to high prices.⁴¹ On the contrary, the colonial government encouraged the British iron-making industries and had given some exclusive privileges during the nineteenth century. In 1830, J.M. Heath set up iron-making industries at Porto Nova in South Arcot and availed the right of cutting trees for fuel in the government wasteland. Then he had made agreements with various Collectors to get lease for 21 years to raise ore and cut down trees for fuel. Under this lease, they did not pay any rent for the first five years, subject to the payment of a small annual rent for the remaining lease period. The government also provided financial assistance for these industries. In 1853, the East India Company was started with a capital of Rs 400,000. Exclusive rights of cutting ore from the government wastelands in South Arcot, Salem, Malabar, Canara and Coimbatore was granted to it for a term of 30 years, subject to an annual payment of Rs 500 as rent.⁴² The company erected new works at Tirnomalai in South Arcot district and Pulampatti in Salem district. Due to scarcity of fuel, the company's iron-making industries at Pulampatti were closed in 1858. Porto Nova operations came to an end in 1866 and Beypore and Tirnomalai in 1867. Again, in 1875, the company's iron-making industry established in Madras secured rights to make charcoal in 42 square miles of forest land in North Arcot on paying a small seigniorage and it was discontinued in July 1877.⁴³

In addition to the native iron-smelting industries and British iron-making company, the sugar-boiling industries in the different districts of the Madras Presidency consumed a large quantity of fuel-wood during the early colonial period. After colonial intervention, the British sugar factories also accentuated denudation of forests. For example, Messrs Parry and Co, Sugar Factory at Tiruvannanallur had consumed annually about 3,500 tons of wood, and the same group's sugar factory at Nellikuppam consumed more than that of the first one.⁴⁴ In some places, only a meagre amount was collected as tax for supplying fuel-wood to the sugar factories. The Aska Sugar Factory in Ganjam paid one rupee per license to cut down an unlimited quantity of firewood till 1879. This sugar factory had felled about 10,000 tons annually from the forest.⁴⁵ It proves beyond doubt that the native iron-making industries during the pre-colonial period and the colonial policy on the colonial iron-making industries and sugar-boiling industries during the nineteenth century resulted in the destruction of the hill forests to a greater extent in the different regions of the Madras Presidency.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

IV

Establishment of Madras Railways

Establishment of Madras Railways in the Madras Presidency witnessed a large extent of forests being wiped out. The Madras Railways had used fuel-wood more than coal during the third quarter of the nineteenth century. While coal had to be purchased from outside for a heavy price, wood was largely available within the Madras Presidency at a cheaper rate. The consumption of fuel-wood by the Railway had increased remarkably from 9,821 tons in 1863 to 54,358 tons in 1868.⁶⁶ In 1878, the Locomotive Superintendent of Madras Railway estimated that the average cost of coal and wood per ton, for the five-year period (1873-77) was Rs 28-2-11 and Rs 5-15-11 respectively (see Table 2). The average consumption of wood per engine mile for the same period (1873-77) was 89.53 lbs, whereas for coal it was only 26.75 lbs. In other words, the quantity of coal required per engine mile was only 1.00 lbs, and for wood 3.35 lbs. Though the required wood per engine mile was high, the price was very low when compared to that of coal. The average (1873-77) cost of coal per ton was Rs 28-2-11 while 3.35 tons of wood cost only Rs 20-1-4. The amount expended on fuel-wood consumption by Madras Railway during 1873-77 was Rs 1,736,482. Of this, 40 per cent, equal to Rs 694,593 was saved with the consumption of wood instead of coal.⁶⁷ Against this background, the Madras Railway preferred

Table 2
The Average Prices of Coal and Wood: 1873-77

(in Rupees)

Year	Cost Per Ton					
	Coal			Wood		
	Rs	A	P	Rs	A	P
1873	28	14	6	5	15	4
1874	32	6	5	5	13	6
1875	28	12	2	5	13	11
1876	24	6	7	6	1	6
1877	25	5	10	6	1	1
Average	28	2	11	5	15	11

Source: Government Order No. 373, Public Works Department (Railways), 26 April 1878, Tamil Nadu State Archives.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 32

⁶⁷ Government Order (hereafter G.O.) No. 373, Public Works Department (Railways), 26 April 1878, TNSA

to use wood rather than coal. Between 1873-77, about 354,921 tons of wood was purchased for the Railway fuel (see Table 3). Subsequently, fuel-wood requirement of Madras Railway had increased every year.

Table 3
Fuel-wood Purchased for the Madras Railways: 1873-77
(Quantity in Tons)

Year	Total Quantity Purchased
1873	44,693
1874	55,107
1875	57,466
1876	77,731
1877	119,924
Total	354,921

Source: Government Order No. 373, Public Works Department (Railways), 26 April 1878, Tamil Nadu State Archives.

In 1878, the agent of the Madras Railway stated that the approximate requirement of wood for fuel was about 91,000 tons.* In 1881, railways consumed about 68,420 tons of wood. Of this, about 55,760 tons had come from the private forests and the rest was drawn from the government forests (see Table 4). The colonial government had also purchased a large quantity of fuel-wood for Railways from private forests.

Table 4
Sources of Fuel-wood Supply to Madras Railways
(in Tons)

Sl No	Districts	Government	Private	Total
1	Nizam's Dominions	-	2,550	2,550
2	Bellary	-	1,120	1,120
3	Cuddapah	8,860	1,800	10,660
4	North Arcot	2,750	23,440	26,190
5	Mysore	-	850	850
6	Salem	650	10,750	11,400
7	Coimbatore	400	-	400
8	Malabar	-	15,250	15,250
Total		12,660	55,760	68,420

Source: Brandis, *Suggestions Regarding Forest Administration*, p. 40.

* Brandis, *Suggestions Regarding Forest Administration*, p. 40.

The idea of protecting forests was initiated as early as in 1865 in the different districts of the Madras Presidency. This was not for maintaining ecological balance and to protect the environment but for the future requirement and constant fuel-wood supply to the Madras Railways. To put it differently, protection of forest was to further commercial interests. About 3,482 acres of forests were protected in the different districts of the Madras Presidency between 1865 and 1874 (see Table 5). These protected forests were cut down between 1875 and 1882 and about 12,536 tons of wood was consumed. Prior to the Madras Forest Act 1883, some forests were protected/reserved only to be cut down for the Railways' fuel and berths.

Table 5
Protected Forests in Different Districts

Sl No	District	Reserve	Protected	When cut since	Area cut in Acres	Outturn in Tons	
						Total	Per Acre
1	Cuddapah	Ballipalle I	1867	1876	3	59	19.6
2	Cuddapah	Ballipalle II	1871	1876	3	35	11.6
3	Cuddapah	Kodur Hill	1871-74	1880-81	135	1,919	14.25
4	Cuddapah	Yerraguntlakota	1873	1880-81	155	958	6.25
5	Cuddapah	Vakaticonah	1874	1880-81	200	1,248	6.20
6	North Arcot	not stated	1865	1875	1	11	11
7	North Arcot	Mamandur	1871	1880-82	1,777	4,952	2.8
8	Salem	Varigampatti	1866-67	1876	100	455	4.5
9	Salem	Varigampatti	1866-67	1875-79	886*	2,255	2.8
10	Salem	Morur	1866	1882	100	384	3.8
11	Salem	Pothur	1868-69	1877-78	112	140	1.25
12	South Arcot	Gingee	-	1876	10	120	12

* Note: 100 acres cut in 1876 from part of the 886 acres cut in 1875-79.

Source: Brandis, *Suggestions Regarding Forest Administration*, p. 45.

Due to the laying of Madras Railways, a large number of valuable trees were cut down in the forest areas of Salem and Baramahal region. In 1859-60, seigniorage amounting to nearly Rs 23,500 was realised on berths alone, and the number of berths supplied in 1859-60 was about 245,743.⁶ The colonial government did not take any action against these forest fellings. In 1866-67, hundreds of thousands of trees were cut illicitly by the cattle drivers for the railways. The government was helpless as the Magistrates refused to convict them for theft.⁷ In 1870, the Conservator of Forests stated that the government should look at the amount of timber

⁶ F.J. Richards, *Madras District Gazetteer, Salem District*, Vol. I, Part II, Madras, 1918, p. 248.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

being taken out freely from the Salem jungle alone, and come to terms that no forest could possibly stand a drain of that nature.⁷¹ The fuel-wood supply to the railways stated to have come from private forests was, in fact, cut on government land, and the forest officers had neither the establishment nor resources to prevent it.⁷² Brandis, Conservator of Forest in the Madras Presidency (1881–83) recommended that the Railways should be encouraged to extract the maximum from private forests, and once it exhausted that, then the government forest may be used.⁷³ But it is evident that the colonial government did not take any measure towards conservation. The railways continued, as ever, to consume a large quantity of trees from both the private and government forests during the late nineteenth century.

V

Consumption of Neighbourhood Towns

A considerable extent of the hill forest cover was denuded by the villages in the vicinity and thickly inhabited towns in the Madras Presidency. In Salem and Baramahal region, most of the hill slopes were cleared by the neighbourhood plain inhabitants.⁷⁴ Firewood demand of the two major towns viz., Salem and Attur, was largely supplied from the neighbouring hill slopes, as also from distant places. The fuel-wood demand of Salem town was met from: (i) Topur forests, which was about 24 miles away from where the wood was brought in carts; (ii) the southern slopes of Shervaroy hills, off 3 miles, and mostly brought through headloads; (iii) forests adjoining Manjavadi pass, off about 12 miles, the wood was brought on cartloads; (iv) headloads from Bodamalai hills, about 5 miles away and; (v) from Jarugumalai, about 2 miles away. For headloads, certain amount, i.e., one pie to four pies was paid according to the description of the wood.⁷⁵ Till 1870, there was no tax on the fuel-wood supply to the Salem town.⁷⁶ Brandis (1883) estimated that about 10,000 acres of well-stocked forests were required to meet the fuel-wood demand of Salem town alone.⁷⁷ The thickly inhabited towns and villages were also accountable for the destruction of the forests during the pre- and early colonial regime of the nineteenth century.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Brandis, *Suggestions Regarding Forest Administration*, p. 40.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

VI

Coffee Cultivation

The British initiated coffee cultivation in different hill regions during the early nineteenth century. In Southern India, coffee plantations were established on the highlands of the west coast regions viz., Mysore, Coorg, Travancore, Wynaud and Nilgiris during the nineteenth century.⁷⁶ Of this, Wynaud and Nilgiris belonged to the Madras Presidency. To some extent, coffee plantations were set up in the Shervaroy hills of Salem district. In Madras Presidency, the coffee plants/plantations were introduced in different periods between the late eighteenth century and first half of the nineteenth century. The first coffee plants were introduced at Tripatoor in Baramahal towards making large-scale plantations by Colonel Read, Collector of Salem and Baramahal in the year 1795. But these plants perished due to lack of maintenance.⁷⁷ Later, a small tract of land was brought under coffee cultivation in Jawadhy hills near Tripatoor by the natives. In 1825, coffee plants were introduced in the Shervaroy hills by M.D. Cockburn, and in Wynaud, around 1833, by Major Bevan. The first regular plantation was opened by Mr Glasson in 1840 on the hills at Manantoddy, followed by others. In these regions, coffee was cultivated in the grass or bamboo land, making the venture unprofitable. So, coffee plantations were transferred to South Wynaud. In 1855-56, the number of estates increased in these regions. In 1857, about 12,000 acres was under coffee cultivation, of which 10,000 acres or 83.33 per cent was held by 32 European colonists, and the rest by the natives. In the Nilgiris, coffee plants were introduced in 1846. In the beginning, plantations were established in the eastern slopes which got extended to southern, northern and north-western slopes. During the first-half of the nineteenth century coffee estates were mostly held by European colonists.

In 1885, coffee plantations were there only in eight districts, of which seven belonged to the southern districts of Madras Presidency and the rest in the northern districts. Coffee plants were largely found only in Malabar with 52,964.97 acres; Nilgiris with 35,128 acres and Salem with 10,769 acres. In the remaining districts it was considerably less. Large-sized coffee plantations were found only in the Nilgiris and Malabar districts whereas the smaller ones were found in Madura district. During the nineteenth century, increase in coffee cultivation prevailed in Malabar, Nilgiris and Salem districts. In 1885, of about 108,358.77 acres under coffee in Madras Presidency, 53,917.724 acres (49 per cent) were under mature coffee plants

⁷⁶ C.D. Maclean, *Manual of the Administration of the Madras Presidency*, Vol. I, Madras, 1885, p. 290.

⁷⁷ *Papers Relating to the Coffee Districts of the Madras Presidency*, Madras, 1859, pp. 1 and 4.

and 9,208.996 acres (8.49 per cent) under immature plants. The rest—45,232.05 acres (41.74 per cent)—were taken up for planting which had to commence yet.²⁰ In the second-half of the nineteenth century only a large tract of hill lands with dense forest were chosen for coffee cultivation in the Madras Presidency.

In Salem and Baramahal region, coffee introduced by Col Read in 1795 did not succeed.²¹ In 1825, plantations were established in the Shervaroys with about 10 European colonists being engaged in that business at the end of the first-half of nineteenth century.²² According to John Shortt (1864), of the 27 planters involved in cultivating coffee in the Shervaroys, 25 were British colonists, the remaining two being Indians from the plains.²³ In 1885, there were 331 coffee plantations covering about 10,769 acres; of this, 4,440 acres or about 41 per cent was with mature plants; 1,649 acres or 15.31 per cent with immature plants, and the remaining 4,680 acres or 43.46 per cent taken up for planting which was yet to be planted.²⁴ In the Salem and Baramahal region, coffee plantations mainly belonged to the British and large tracts of land were cleared for coffee cultivation during the third quarter of the nineteenth century. This resulted in the denudation of dense forests in the highlands due to the introduction of commercial crops in the hills of the Madras Presidency.

VII

Tribals and Forest Act

While non-tribals were behind the large-scale destruction of forests, it was accentuated by the colonial commercial forest policy during the early period of the nineteenth century. Instead of restricting the non-tribals, the colonial government imposed several conditions on the tribals through the Madras Forest Act (1882). The forest-oriented tribal economy was disrupted by these conditions, which deprived them of their common property rights. Their mode of production was disturbed and their economic conditions deteriorated over the period.

With establishment of the Forest Department in 1856, the first Indian Forest Act came into effect in 1865. The Madras Forest Act, 1882 (Madras Act No. V of 1882) was the first Forest Act in the Presidency. This restricted the unlimited access the tribals had over the forest. The tribals could claim only a right of way, watercourses, pasture and forest produce (Section 10). These also were not, wholly or partly, allowed by the Forest

²⁰ Maclean, *Manual of the Administration*, Vol. II, p. 403.

²¹ *Papers relating to Coffee Districts*, p. 1.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ John Shortt, *A Hand-book to Coffee Planting*, Madras, 1864, p. 104.

²⁴ Maclean, *Manual of the Administration*, Vol. II, p. 403.

Department (Section 11). Furthermore, these rights were granted intermittently, and with quantitative restrictions (Section 12). Fresh clearings for cultivation or for any other purpose were also curbed (Section 7). If prohibited items were used by the tribals, they were liable for imprisonment for a period of six months or a fine of about Rs 500, or both (Section 21). Grazing rights on the forest land were limited and liable for suspension (Section 22). If the tribals grazed their cattle in the closed land, they would be imprisoned for a month or fined Rs 200, or both (Section 28). Apart from these, the tribals were forced to render free services for the Forest and Police Officers.

VIII

Impact on the Tribals

The first notification of forest reserve was published in 1883, which covered an area of 550,614 acres or 222,830.43 hectares in Salem and Baramahal regions.⁶⁵ Subsequently, a large extent of the hills were notified as Reserve Forest. Coupled with this, many restrictions were clamped on the tribals for using the forest and forest produce.

The Forest Department extended the Reserve Forest in the Kalroyan hills without considering the interests of the hill inhabitants viz., Malaiyalis ('malai' in Tamil means hill or mountain, and 'yali' means inhabitants or rulers). For instance, in the Kalroyan hills, the public worship and car festival of Kariyasamy temple⁶⁶ was stopped, following the inclusion of the temple and surrounding *inam* lands within the reserve and forest extension.⁶⁷ Some *inam* lands of jagirdars were also included in the Reserve Forest. A jagirdar stated that the Reserve Forests were demarcated without considering the interest of memorialists; nor were they consulted in extending the forest, which resulted in a lot of lands belonging to the memorialists, including *inam* lands, being taken away. The memorialists were put to great hardship, loss and inconvenience.⁶⁸ As the tribals faced a lot of problem, they did not celebrate the festival because the forest boundary ran only a few chains from the Kariyasamy temple. This hardly left any place for such a large festive gathering.⁶⁹ This was one of the many instances of how the Forest Department restricted the tribals' rights.

The government came forward to reformulate the boundary line regarding the temple. But the Collector objected to the exclusion of the *inam*

⁶⁵ M. Harikrishnan, *Working Plan for the Salem Forest Division, 1967/68-1976/77*, Salem, 1977, p. 29.

⁶⁶ At the time of festivals, more than 10,000 people attended the temple daily.

⁶⁷ G.O. No. 996, Revenue [Misc.], 22 August 1906, TNSA.

⁶⁸ Board Petition, No. 442, 1905, TNSA.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

lands. He said, '... even if the fields were cultivated, it is doubtful that the revenue would come to the Government, instead of the *poligar*, as *ryots* of the *poligar* villages only would cultivate them'.⁸⁰ The Collector stated categorically that no income would come to the government, if jagirdar's *inams* were excluded from the Reserve Forest.

The unrestricted rights of the tribals over forests were curtailed by the Forest Department in manifold ways from time to time. For example, the Shervaroy hill inhabitants were allowed to cut only small quantities of firewood, wood for housing and agricultural purposes. Certain trees were prohibited from being cut down.⁸¹ The Forest Department also restricted cutting a maximum of three bandy-loads a month. To take away wood from the hills, a person was required to obtain a free pass from the tahsildars. For the prohibited trees, three annas were collected per head-load.⁸² These restrictions were opposed by the people of Shervaroy hills. To contain the resentment, the government issued an order in 1870 stating that the Malaiyalis, '... can obtain free passes for firewood and timber for their own requirements on application to the Deputy tahsildar'.⁸³ As per the order, the hill inhabitants could collect the required material without any limitation. The Kalroyan hill Malaiyalis were also asked to collect the free passes from the tahsildar for using the forest produce and for grazing their cattle. Jagirdars and inhabitants of the Kalroyan hills raised their voice against these formalities. In response, the government ordered, in 1881, allowing, '... free use, with reasonable facilities, of the village jungle for procuring what they require for building purpose, for agricultural implements and for fuel; certain classes of trees of a superior description being restricted and payment required for their use for such purposes'.⁸⁴

Considering the revenue, the colonial administration tried to bring the tribal private forests under government control. Towards achieving this, the government followed all possible irregularities. The hill chieftains were brought under custody and divisions were created among them. Ultimately, the tribal private forest was brought under government control through lease. Failing to realise the expected revenue from the private forests, the government finally returned them to the hill jagirdars.⁸⁵

Alienation of some traditional rights was the direct impact of the introduction of commercial crops into the hill areas. Most of the rights, like common property resources, were indirectly alienated attendant to the introduction of coffee plantations in the Shervaroy hills of Salem and

⁸⁰ G.O. No. 996, Revenue [Misc.], 22 August 1906, TNSA.

⁸¹ G.O. No. 2027 Revenue, 14 December 1870, TNSA.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ G.O. No. 150, Revenue, 18 January 1881, TNSA.

⁸⁵ For details, see V. Saravanan, 'Colonial Commercial Forest Policy and Tribal Private Forest in Madras Presidency, 1792-1881' (unpublished).

Baramahal region during the nineteenth century as well as early twentieth century.

Land was granted to the British settlers for coffee cultivation under the Government Order of 7 April 1833.⁹⁶ Under this, a lease agreement was made between British settlers and the government for 21 years. Some more concessions were provided to them to extend coffee cultivation: first, the land was given rent-free for the initial five years; second, the land rent was low, i.e., rupee one per acre per annum for the remaining 16 years of the lease period.⁹⁷ In this way, the colonial government paved the way for tribal land alienation in the Shervaroy hills.

Due to the encouragement and concessions given to them, the British settlers desired to establish more coffee plantations in the Shervaroys. A large extent of the land was purchased from the native tribals for a meagre price. In addition, the British settlers tried to use some unoccupied lands and forests, which were used by the tribals as common property rights without any restriction. The government nevertheless claimed that the tribals were consulted and their assent was obtained before the lands were taken up for coffee cultivation.⁹⁸ Actually, the tribals were not aware of all the formalities entered into by the colonial government. Till 1841, the government did not initiate any measure to protect the tribals from the planters. As a result, '... most of the old planters obtained their lands from the Malaiyalis and received *pattas* for them prior to the circulation of the government rules'.⁹⁹ In 1842, the government ordered that the land should not be taken by the settlers in such localities so as to cause an inconvenience to the inhabitants, i.e., Malaiyalis, or those lands which the latter might be willing to occupy.¹⁰⁰ Though certain areas of land were reserved for the Malaiyalis under this Act, the planters, however, had obtained these lands wherever they were fertile and conveniently located.

It was not the British planters alone who had taken away tribal lands; the colonial administrators including Collectors and Judges took possession of them. Mr Cockburn, Collector of Salem, had taken land by force, seized and appropriated all the best lands of the chief village of the Mootoo Nadu, and expelled the proprietors thereof. Mr Neave, Judge of Salem, got possession of more than 400 or 500 acres land between 1838-41 under not very dissimilar circumstances.¹⁰¹ The colonial government not only encouraged the British planters to settle in the hills but also could not prevent its officers from misusing their power to occupy tribal lands in the Shervaroy hills to further their private interests.

⁹⁶ BOR, Vol. 1886, 30 October 1843, p. 1614, TNSA.

⁹⁷ G.O No. 1793, Revenue, 17 August 1936, p. 42, TNSA.

⁹⁸ BOR, Vol. 2005, 5 January 1846, pp. 170-71, TNSA.

⁹⁹ BOR, Vol. 2310, 11 December 1851, p. 16470, TNSA.

¹⁰⁰ Richards, *Madras District Gazetteers*, p. 47.

¹⁰¹ BOR, Vol. 1838, 15 December 1842, p. 16685, TNSA.

In order to grab tribal lands, the British planters created many problems to the Malaiyali inhabitants. To cite one instance, in 1864, Hunter, a British planter, tried to obtain the Malaiyali lands in the village of Pattapadi and Kurdyoor. But the Malaiyalis refused to sell their lands. He then attempted to drive them out through every possible means and pressed the other planters to do likewise. Besides closing every public path of Malaiyalis running through his land, the planter also shot down their cattle. The British planters also used colonial officers to threaten the Malaiyalis, to obtain their land.¹⁰² While ignorant tribals badly suffered at the hands of British planters, the colonial administrators always acted in favour of the British planters. The officialdom was never seriously concerned about the plight of the tribals or the threat to the ecology and environment. In short, due to the introduction of commercial crops in the hill areas, tribal rights, to some extent, were alienated directly, while most of their rights on common property resources were indirectly alienated as in the case of coffee plantations in the Shervaroys of Salem and Baramahal region during the nineteenth century.

IX

Conclusion

The forest and its produce had been used as a common property rights by the highland people as well as those of the neighbourhood plains. The right over the forest was never a big question which fulfilled their requirements. It indeed became a question, when it was denuded for commercial purposes. During the pre-colonial period, felling was there to some extent, to meet the demand of the traditional industries as well as the needs of neighbourhood towns. After colonial intervention, the government did not pay any attention to protect the environment and maintain ecological balance. Instead large tracts of prime forests were denuded by the middlemen/contractors/government for exports and further by the British iron-making industries and Madras Railways besides the introduction of commercial crops. Instead of restricting this commercial exploitation, the colonial government, without initiating any development/welfare measures, curbed the tribals' common property rights through the Madras Forest Act. In other words, denudation of forest was the fruit of the colonial forest policy during the nineteenth century. The idea of forest conservation for environmental protection was not only ignored during the pre-Forest Department period in the Madras Presidency but also after that, until the introduction of the Madras Forest Act 1882, during which commercialisation of forests was predominantly practised by the colonial government.

¹⁰² Letter from Arbuthnot to the BOR, 23 May 1866, TNSA.

Towards Dussehra 1831: The revolt of Lallaji Patel

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Malwa, lying at the heart of the Indian peninsula, was a difficult region for the British from the point of view of colonial penetration. This part of the country was still unconquered at the beginning of the nineteenth century. When the East India Company emerged as the paramount power in Malwa following the third Anglo-Maratha war (1818), it preferred placing the entire area under 'indirect rule'. For the rest of the colonial period Malwa was to remain under various indigenous rulers who, of course, acknowledged British supremacy. To a large extent this was true of most of neighbouring Rajasthan as well, but there were marked differences. The most obvious was that the indigenously administered states of Rajasthan were presided over by a ruling class which invariably belonged to James Tod's Great Rajput tradition and was therefore, in many ways, homogeneous. The territories of the Rajasthani states were relatively compact and the territories of the most important of them were historically quite well defined. As for Malwa, a large number of rulers and petty chiefs with very diverse social/regional/ethnic/historical origins (Marathas, Rajputs, Pathans and Pindaris, among others), many of whom turned out to be tough customers, controlled different parts of Malwa. Compact territorial states were exceptions rather than the rule. This was more so in the case of the politically ascendant Maratha states, particularly the two most important of them, the Sindia and Holkar states, whose territories were widely dispersed throughout Malwa. Further, much of Rajasthan was made unattractive by the Thar desert, whereas most of Malwa was a remarkably

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productive, fertile plain. As Ian Copland observes, 'Princely rule was suffered to exist by the British in areas where difficult topography (the salt flats of Cutch, the jungle uplands of Rewa Kantha, the steep ridges and valleys of the Western Ghats, the desert of Sind) and remoteness from the heartland of imperial power made the setting up of a direct administration hazardous and costly'.¹ The Malwa region was thus unique in some ways. Lying at the junction of northern and western India and the Deccan, it was not a remote area on the frontier or periphery.² It had a vibrant commerce, it had considerable strategic importance; and it was warily that the British approached it.

Colonial consolidation in Malwa was a protracted affair. The East India Company had to wage two major wars—the second and third Anglo-Maratha wars—before it could effectively alter the balance of political power in Malwa in its favour. Malwa had a formidable tradition of resistance to colonial rule, which played no insignificant role in the great revolt of 1857–58. This tradition earnestly sought to reverse the outcome of 1818. The history of this resistance is neither well known nor well documented. But the glimpses we have, from scanty source material, of some of the episodes which belong to this tradition reveal enough to suggest that such resistance was one of the factors which contributed towards prolonging the struggle for hegemony between indigenous groups in Malwa and the company, much beyond 1818.

One impressive episode that forms part of the history of post-1818/pre-1857 peoples' anti-colonial resistance in Malwa occurred at the beginning of the third decade of the nineteenth century. A prominent part was played in this by a certain Lallaji Patel, 'a man of the Aheer Caste', who emerged as the leader of a movement which had a millenarian ring to it.³ Lallaji Patel, with his base in 'that part of Malwa . . . which is denominated Soondwarah [and] abounds more than others with subjects of a lawless character and given to predatory habits', was described as a 'disturber who calls himself the miracle-performing Raja', and was supposed to have assembled an army of '5,000 or more foot and several hundred horse', to 'defeat the English' and 'establish his authority over the whole country'.⁴

¹ Ian Copland, *The British Raj and the Indian Princes: Paramountcy in Western India, 1857–1930*, Bombay, 1982, p. 2.

² Almost the entire elevated plain of Malwa lies in Madhya Pradesh. The western Madhya Pradesh districts of Mandasaur, Ratlam, Ujjain, Indore, Dhar, Dewas, Shajapur, Rajgarh and Vidisha constitute the main Malwa area. In the north-west, Malwa extends to the portions of the Chittaurgarh and Jhalawar districts of Rajasthan which lie immediately adjacent to Mandasaur district.

³ 'Extracts from Indore Ukhbars', tr., 8 September 1831, National Archives of India, Foreign Department Miscellaneous (hereafter NAI, FD Misc.), Indore Letters (hereafter, IL), 192/u (this volume hereafter, IL, 192/u).

⁴ G. Wellesley, Resident, Indore, to Government of India, 28 September 1831, IL, 192/u; 'Extracts from Oujein Ukhbars', tr., 9 September 1831, IL, 192/u; Raoji Ganesh, *kamavisdar*, Agar, to Sindia's *vakil* at Indore, received 22 September 1831, IL, 192/u; Rusaladar Jalal Khan to Capt. B. McMahon, 3 September 1831, IL, 192/u.

Lallaji Patel had been heard telling his followers 'that on the day of the Dusserah [1831] he intends to commence his reign, that the 18 Jhandas [standards] he has raised will be sent into various quarters where as many soubahs shall be established'.⁵ Although Lallaji Patel perished at the hands of the British just before the Dussehra of 1831 without being able to offer much resistance, the threat he represented appears to have been perceived by the British as a very serious one.⁶

I

Lallaji Patel's revolt had its epicentre in the Satmahals of Sondhwara. Sondhwara was a loosely defined sub-region of northern Malwa, deriving its name from the presence of the hardy Sondhias settled in this tract. This sub-region broadly includes northern Ujjain and Ratlam, most of Jhalawar, southern Mandsaur and Shajapur and Rajgarh districts.⁷ The Satmahals territory in Sondhwara was subject to Sindia. One should bear in mind that it is not easy to accurately define the political geography of Malwa in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Boundaries of the political entities comprising Malwa were frozen only after 1818–19. The preceding three decades or so witnessed a violent struggle for the control of this area. Borders constantly shifted, territories changed hands and rights were usurped with fluctuations in the fortunes of the contestants.

By the beginning of the eighteenth century the Mughals had lost their monopoly of power in Malwa. Following this, there was an intense struggle for power in the region. The Marathas were key contestants in this struggle and succeeded in establishing themselves as the chief wielders of political power in Malwa by the mid-eighteenth century. The other participants in the struggle were the Rajputs, Pathans and, later in the century, the Pindaris. During the period of Maratha supremacy, Malwa was divided between the Sindias with their capital at Ujjain (and after c. 1810 at Gwalior), the Holkars, with their capital at Indore, and the Pawars, with one branch ruling at Dhar and the other from Dewas. Eastern Malwa was directly under the Peshwas.

The Sindia and Holkar states were, at the beginning of the century, groping for a way out of the fragmented nature of state formation in Malwa. In a situation where it was difficult to define the state territorially,

⁵ McMahon to Wellesley, 22 September 1831, IL, 192/u. With the collapse of Mughal authority, *suba* referred to what would earlier have been called a *sarkar*; similarly, *pargana* corresponded to what was earlier a *mahal*.

⁶ McMahon to Capt. W. Borthwick, agent, Mehidpur, 1 October 1831, IL, 192/u.

⁷ According to John Malcolm, the tract from Gangdhar (district Jhalawar) to Ujjain; and from the Chambal to Agar (district Shajapur) was designated 'Sondwarra'. John Malcolm, *A Memoir of Central India, including Malwa and Adjoining Provinces*, 2 Vols, London, 1823, Vol. I, p. 511

this fragmentation allowed intermediaries and dominant landed groups to negotiate better terms for themselves. Colonial intervention diminished the leverage which these sections possessed. Nevertheless, the leaders of the 1831 insurrection assumed that possibilities for graduating to control of minor chieftaincies were not totally exhausted, though in the colonial discourse there was little room for dealing with the social class from which Lallaji came, in terms defined by that class.

Lallaji was a petty village level official, the *patel* or headman of village Deoguradiya (or Guradiya Deo, tahsil Susner, district Shajapur) which is about 8 kilometres west of Nalkhera, in the Satmahals. He consciously targeted the British, and thus revealed his grasp of the essentials of the political situation in Malwa. The company might not have taken over the administration of Malwa, but its military strength had the capacity to make or unmake fortunes in the region. The post-1818 settlement had mainly taken care of the claims of and relationships between the more prominent players in Malwa: rajas, petty chiefs, zamindars, intermediaries and revenue farmers in the substantive agrarian tracts. However, turn of the century Malwa was a society in transition, with various groups, particularly in outlying areas, waiting for an opportunity to perform new roles which would more adequately be in keeping with their political aspirations.

Most of Malwa, especially in the north, west and south is surrounded by hills and/or jungle. These were inhabited by communities with patterns of subsistence in which agriculture did not figure prominently. The Malwa-Gujarat-Rajasthan junction and the Vindhya-Satpura region was (and is) an extensive tribal belt. This belt is home to several nomadic and vagrant people many of whom took to 'the rather dangerous, but still exciting life of "foraging" in the fields, villages and towns of northern India' when they found it difficult to sustain themselves on the basis of foodgathering and hunting.⁸ Southward expansion of the Mughal empire, the thrust of the Deccan kingdoms, the Mughal-Maratha conflict and Maratha empire-building had speeded up the process of detribalisation and state formation in this region during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the later medieval period pastoralists, recently settled peasants and tribals living on the periphery of settled agrarian societies in Malwa were going through a phase of transition which was reflected in large numbers of Bhils, Sondhias, Kolis, Minas, Ramoshis, Bagdis and Gonds taking to military service on

⁸ Stephen Fuchs, *The Aboriginal Tribes of India*, Delhi, 1973, p. 106. To these were added communities which were uprooted due to wars and colonial penetration in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. They took to plunder and 'criminal' activities when they found themselves unable to earn a living as farmers, artisans or soldiers: 'They are thus not primitive food gatherers, but more like degraded Rajputs, Jats and members of other martial castes generally of higher social rank and belonging to a superior cultural category. Even in the pursuance of their criminal activities they display a higher intelligence, more involved techniques and a strong spirit of adventure often coupled with a certain chivalry' *Ibid.*, p. 107.

the one hand and settled cultivation on the other. This development sustained many of the new chieftaincies. At another level, the crisis which colonial intervention had created for groups which had been the mainstay of the military labour market in Malwa caused dispersed soldiers to look to leaders of the Lallaji-type for new openings. By holding out the prospect of founding a new state, Lallaji tried to assure his military recruits that he was offering them a lasting solution rather than an unstable and insecure existence as bandits.

Sindia's Satmahals lay in a zone which was virtually no-man's-land during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The more fertile and settled portions of this tract had initially formed part of the eastern Malwa parganas which were directly administered by Pune. However, Pune became a distant reality as the eighteenth century wore on, and these parganas and the adjoining areas either slipped from Maratha control altogether or came under Sindia/Holkar influence. To the north, the stretch between Jhalawar and the Betwa river was the frontier region of the Sindia and Holkar territories. This was inhabited by cattle-herders, pastoralists, relatively recently settled peasants, tribal groups and marginal people. There were the Sondhias, Gujars, Mewatis, Bhils, Minas, etc., to name a few, besides agro-pastoralists such as the Ahirs (the territory from the east of Malwa to the Betwa river was often referred to as Ahirwara).⁹ This sub-region of Malwa along with adjoining Bundelkhand forms part of the province which Dirk Kolff considers a major recruiting area for troopers in medieval and later medieval north India.¹⁰

The states of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century had to have access to military strength on a scale that was qualitatively different from that of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century. This was necessary in order to contain local magnates who had extended the scope of their power as well as to engage in the task of resisting militarily potent western colonial powers. Some of the Maratha chiefs have been alive to the urgent need to update their military formations. Sindia and Holkar seriously tried to mobilise an army of a modern type, but did not have states which could adequately respond to the resource requirements of such a force. Mahadji Sindia and, to a lesser extent, Ahilya Bai, Tukoji Holkar and Yashwant Rao Holkar I had laid the foundations of centrally-financed, well-equipped and professionally trained armies. These were frequently trained by Europeans.¹¹ By the 1780s, Sindia and Holkar armies had several European officers. After 1818, the Sindia and Holkar military modernisation programme had to be abandoned, thereby dashing the hopes of trained

⁹ Cf. C.S. Venkatachar, 'Introduction', *Census Report of the Central India Agency, 1931*, Vol. XXII, p. 277.

¹⁰ Dirk H.A. Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan, 1450-1850*, Cambridge, 1990, pp. 87-91.

¹¹ Cf. S.N. Sen, *The Military System of the Marathas*, Bombay, 1958, pp. 115, 117, 120-21.

professional soldiers of the new armies or 'campoos', as the elite armed contingents of the Malwa states were called.

The upheavals caused by the Anglo-Maratha and Pindari wars had driven many of the dispersed soldiers of indigenous states—which had been forced to curtail their military strength or disband their armies altogether—into the arms of contractors for minuscule private armies. The late eighteenth and early nineteenth century marked the transition from contractor-based troop recruitment to centralised recruitment. This was especially true of the company which sought to curtail the role of military entrepreneurs of the de Boigne–James Skinner era. With colonial ascendancy and the marginalisation of private initiative in raising and training armed contingents, there were yet fewer opportunities for soldiers of the old type, most of whom owed their employment and training to contractors and leaders of war-bands. The negotiating skills of the leader/contractor on behalf of the group were as important as the individual fighting skills of these soldiers. The fate of James Skinner, who had been instrumental in organising an armed force on behalf of the company during the early phase of its expansion into north India and was quickly dispensed with, portrays the failure of the company to provide opportunities for the dispersed late pre-colonial soldiery. This was, as Seema Alavi notes, partly due to the 'Company's suspicion of the troopers' loyalties and the scepticism about the political interest of the old military class [which] were never really dispelled', and partly because 'at the international level the military techniques and nature of warfare were changing. Infantry regiments were becoming more important . . . The Indian army had to keep pace with these worldwide changes if it had to fight wars for the Empire'.¹²

Viewed against this backdrop it is easy to comprehend that ultimately the resources of Lallaji were too meagre for a sustained military struggle. This was also true of the several petty zamindars who rallied behind him. Armed combat in the open field against the forces of the East India Company was no longer a viable option. It was precisely this kind of engagement that Lallaji attempted, and fell without a serious fight. Probably, a popular guerrilla uprising might have lasted longer. Surely the days of the rebel with 100–150 horses were over. Stewart Gordon has suggested in the context of eighteenth century Mughal Malwa that 'with between 100 and 500 troops a leader might threaten smaller zamindars and Mughal garrisons in rural areas'.¹³ That this situation no longer obtained had been amply demonstrated in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century confrontations

¹² Seema Alavi, 'The Making of Company Power. James Skinner in the Ceded and Conquered Provinces, 1802–1840', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* (hereafter *IESHR*), Vol. 30(4), 1993, p. 465.

¹³ Stewart N. Gordon, 'The Slow Conquest: Administrative Integration of Malwa into the Maratha Empire', *Modern Asian Studies* (hereafter *MAS*), Vol. 11(1), 1977, p. 35.

with the British. Lallaji, as we shall see, made his essentially pre-modern notion of valour a substitute for the military prowess which he lacked.

II

In the first week of September 1831, disturbing reports began trickling in from the remote Sondhwara Satmahals or 'seven mahals' (Satmahla) of Sindia, pertaining to the rise of a 'new Raja' who had been attracting thousands of ordinary villagers and a large number of petty chieftains, zamindars and village *patels*.¹⁴ The newswriters of various Malwa states stationed in Satmahla were dispatching intelligence about this 'new Raja' (*naya raja*), as Lallaji Patel was referred to. The Kota *akhbar* of 3 September 1831 stated that 'accounts have arrived from the Satmuhula that a Zumeendar has entered into a disturbance stating himself to be inspired by Khundee Rao Deota. He has entertained 40 foot and fifteen horse, pitched tents, collected money from the villages, and he says he will fight the English after the Dusserah'. On the following day, the *akhbar* reported: 'A person who went to the Satmuhula for information saw there standards erected, a musnud spread out . . .'.¹⁵ Already, by the beginning of September, the main contours of the Lallaji legend were well defined.

British officials in Sondhwara had been receiving information of a similar nature around the same time. After the third Anglo-Maratha war, the company had regularly maintained an agent in Sondhwara, with headquarters at Mehidpur (district Ujjain), to oversee colonial interests in the area and keep in touch with the states of Ratlam, Jaora, Pratapgarh, Sailana and Sitamau. Captain W. Borthwick was the agent when Lallaji's revolt broke out and had held this position throughout the 1820s. The Mehidpur agent had a contingent of troops at his disposal. Borthwick was assisted by Captain B. McMahon, who was eventually entrusted with the responsibility of carrying out military operations against Lallaji. An indigenous military official, Risaladar Jalal Khan, had written to McMahon on 3 September 1831 about Lallaji, stating that an informant 'saw an immense crowd collected in his camp, nearly three hundred tents belonging to sahookars and traders, five or six tents belonging to the Putel himself, flags set up, twenty-four horses and mares lately purchased, and about eighty

¹⁴ Anyone intending to visit present day Nalkhera, the focal point of Lallaji Patel's activities, would discover that this part of Malwa still remains remote as ever, very poorly served by any kind of transport. In neighbouring Rajgarh, also a part of Sondhwara, a mere 3.06 per cent villages had any bus or rail link till the 1980s; and just 7.38 per cent villages could be approached by pucca road. The nearest railhead from the district headquarters is 85 kms. *Census of India, 1981, Madhya Pradesh, District Handbook, Rajgarh District*, Part XIII-A, pp. xxi and xxiii.

¹⁵ 'Extracts from the Kotah Ukhbars', 4 September 1831, NAI, Foreign Department Political Consultations (hereafter FDP), 65/18 November 1831.

men armed with matchlocks. The Putel calls himself Alcejah'.¹⁶ The Sondhias were Lallaji's most steady adherents, but his base was not confined to them alone.¹⁷ He counted a large number of Gujars, Ahirs, Pindaris and Rajputs among his supporters.

It was a little after the 15th of the month that the company's officials were spurred to action. By this time, it had become clear that Lallaji was leading a political campaign. This was reflected in the anti-British statements of Lallaji as well as in his challenge to the 1818 status quo, in the shape of appeals to peasants not to pay their dues to the established authorities, appeals which did not go unheeded. Second, the revolt had spread to several parts of northern and eastern Malwa, much beyond Satmahla proper. Finally, there were visible signs that the movement had the potential of becoming violent.

By the middle of September, Lallaji had been able to secure the support of a number of locally influential officials, former officials, zamindars and armed rebels. On the 21st, Borthwick received instructions from his superior, Gerald Wellesley, resident with Holkar and the principal British official in Malwa, to employ troops to suppress Lallaji Patel's movement. Simultaneously, Gwalior asked its Satmahla manager to assist Borthwick with troops. On the 27th, Capt. McMahon set out from Mehidpur to capture the 'new Raja' and his supporters. Lallaji was killed on the 1st of October and his troops dispersed. The revolt was thus short-lived, but while it was on it had the company's officials in jitters.

McMahon commenced his march to Deoguradiya before daybreak on 27 September.¹⁸ Incessant rain slowed down his progress towards the *patel's* camp, which he reached on the fourth day. The environs of Deoguradiya were 'jungly and uneven' requiring a great deal of caution in approaching the site of Lallaji's encampment. When McMahon closed in upon the enemy on the morning of 1 October, 'a dense body of about 500 horse and foot suddenly appeared', advancing to attack the company's troops. McMahon's forces retaliated by opening 'fire from the Infantry from which the fanatic leader and many of his adherents fell dead'.¹⁹ The Indore resident was scarcely able to conceal his sense of relief on hearing of Lallaji's defeat. Wellesley, anxiously awaiting news of the outcome of the battle, hastily scribbled a note addressed to the supreme government, which, in his excitement, he dated 3 September, instead of 3 October: 'This divine Emperor is not destined to overturn our empire in India—he has bit the dust!'²⁰

¹⁶ Jalal Khan to McMahon, 3 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 65/18 November 1831

¹⁷ Cf. Borthwick to Wellesley, 27 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 66/18 November 1831

¹⁸ Borthwick to Wellesley, 27 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 66/18 November 1831.

¹⁹ McMahon to Borthwick, 1 October 1831, IL, 192/u.

²⁰ Wellesley to G. Swinton, Secretary, Government of India, 3 September (October) 1831, NAI, FDP, 69/18 November 1831

The main body of Lallaji's followers managed to escape, taking advantage of the cover provided by standing crops in fields around the village. The encounter left three killed and thirteen wounded on the British side.²¹ McMahon's official report does not give figures for casualties among the supporters of Lallaji. But we know that the chief Sondhia rebels did not participate in the actual fighting. On seeing McMahon's contingent, they lost no time in calculating the odds against Lallaji and decided to save their troops and resources for another day. Lallaji's supporters might not have anticipated that the British would send in their troops so soon; they were somewhat confident of being able to fight Sindia's forces which did not have guns, but taking on the company's troops in the open field was a different matter. McMahon's swift advance had taken them by surprise. When the rebels learnt that the contingent was accompanied by field guns, they 'then knew they must belong to a British force', as Sindia had not stationed any guns in the Satmahals.²²

III

Lallaji, who was around 40 years at the time of the 1831 uprising,²³ had initially come into the limelight as a 'curer of cases of cholera'.²⁴ Almost all contemporary accounts refer to the fact that Lallaji had become well known in Satmahla and adjoining areas due to his supposed ability to treat cholera: 'Lalla Putel first attempted to cure the cholera and having succeeded in a few cases crowds of people assembled round him'.²⁵ 'The cholera he instantly cures', was almost taken for granted without much questioning.²⁶ The medical career of Lallaji had reportedly commenced in right earnest 'about four or five months' before September 1831.²⁷ Though this is not specifically stated, it is quite likely that there may have been a nasty outbreak of cholera in parts of north Malwa at the time. Even if there was no serious epidemic, an outbreak of cholera is hardly unusual in June–September, i.e., precisely the time when (in 1831) word about Lallaji's almost supernatural capacity to treat cholera began to get around. In fact, middle and late September, when Lallaji began attracting villagers in

²¹ McMahon to Borthwick, 1 October 1831, IL, 192/11.

²² Deposition of Pratap Singh, encl. in L. Wilkinson, Political Agent, Eastern Malwa, to Capt. T. Robinson, Officiating Resident, Indore, 2 December 1831, IL, 192/11.

²³ 'Account of Lalla Putel received from persons who have come from his camp', n.d., NAI, FDP, 65/18 November 1831.

²⁴ Wilkinson to Wellesley, 24 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 68/18 November 1831.

²⁵ Substance of letter addressed to the Shajapur *vakil* at Sehore, n.d., enclosed in *ibid*; Raoji Ganesh to Sindia's *vakil* at Indore, received 22 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 65/18 November 1831.

²⁶ Report of Ratanji, thana Chhapera, Narsingharh, tr. enclosed in Wilkinson to Robinson, 2 December 1831, IL, 192/11.

²⁷ Wilkinson to Wellesley, 24 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 68/18 November 1831

thousands, is a particularly unhealthy season in most of north and central India. If one were tracing the history of *patterns* of rumours, then there is an uncanny similarity between rumours which carried along the tale of Lallaji and the stories which were doing the rounds in Malwa prior to the outbreak of the 1857 revolt, including, by a strange coincidence, a replay of the cholera theme. J.W. Kaye, in his *History of the Sepoy War* cites the following in a footnote:

The year 1857, writes Captain Keatinge, opened in Nimar by a general distribution of small cakes, which were passed from village to village. The same, I am aware has occurred all over Northern India At the time they appeared in Nimar, they were everywhere brought from the direction of Indore. That city was at the time afflicted with a severe visitation of cholera, and number of inhabitants died daily.²⁸

Lallaji's therapy was of the nature of faith-healing: 'When sick people are brought to him he sprinkles water on their faces with his own hand and cures them'.²⁹ At times he made the patients drink some water which was supposed to have curative properties.³⁰ It is immaterial whether all this amounted to superstition, given that the actual cause of cholera was unknown till the 1880s or that there was no consensus, in the time of Lallaji, on the various lines of treatment for the disease even within the framework of western ('modern') medicine. What is important is that he was seen as being bestowed with miraculous powers. In popular perception, this was manifested in his ability to treat cholera.

The political agent in eastern Malwa, while summing up the early phase of Lallaji's career noted, 'A belief gradually sprang up in the minds of the people that he had assistance from Heaven which enabled him to work most miraculous cures. Thousands of people consequently began to flock to his place of residence who impressed upon by his artfulness and their own credulity returned to their homes with still more wonderful tales of his miraculous performances'.³¹ This 'cholera' phase, which marked the more spontaneous period of the Lallaji episode, was the prelude to the political phase. It provided the *patel* with an opportunity to project himself. Lallaji seized the moment of impression and decided to, or was prompted to, put his enormous popularity to political use: 'to the character of a prophet he now added that of the founder of a new empire'.³²

²⁸ J.W. Kaye, *A History of the Sepoy War in India, 1857-1858*, fifth edition, London, 1870, Vol. I, p. 572n.

²⁹ 'Account of Lalla Putel . . . etc', n.d., NAI, FD, 65/18 November 1831.

³⁰ *Kamavisdar*, Sarangpur, to Dewas authorities, received 26 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 65/18 November 1831

³¹ Wilkinson to Wellesley, 24 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 68/18 November 1831.

³² *Ibid.*

Once the talent of Lallaji for working miracles had gained extensive recognition, he began articulating his political agenda. The 'miracles' of Lallaji, or rather rumours of his miracles, gained a large audience for his political message. The rumours of miracles were responsible for carrying the Lallaji phenomenon far beyond his immediate locality. Within the space of a few weeks, rumours of Lallaji's miracles had spread like wild-fire, from Kota to Bhopal and from Shujalpur to the Malwa-Mewar border. The earlier spontaneously evolved Lallaji legend soon gave way to an orchestrated campaign to reinforce the image of Lallaji as a miracle-worker. His healing touch now extended to other ailments. The *kamavisdar* of Sarangpur paid a visit to him 'to get his eyesight improved'.³⁵ The former diwan of Narsinghgarh stated that he had been convinced of Lallaji's powers when he took his eleven-year-old son, who 'was exceedingly ill', to the *patel*: 'when I took him to Lalla Putel, he immediately restored him to health'.³⁶

The stories about Lallaji became increasingly fantastic, even sinister. It came to be believed that he could discover thieves and stolen property.³⁷ One account stated that 'A dancing girl who complained of having been plundered on her way to visit him was told to go to a certain stream where she would find the thief lying dead and her property placed upon his breast. She went to the place and found the thief and her property in the situation described by the Putel. *This miracle has increased the confidence of the people*'.³⁸ There were a series of rumours which seem to have been aimed at intimidating those who questioned the authenticity of Lallaji's 'miracles'. 'If any person delays attending when called', it was said; 'or doubts the miracles, he assuredly falls sick'.³⁹ A *harkara* of Holkar turned up with the news that he had himself been witness to the fate of a particular village *patel* who 'taunted the new Raja and received a spear wound from an invisible hand'.⁴⁰ A somewhat excessive exercise of supernatural powers was attributed to Lallaji by the not very sympathetic, though not entirely disbelieving, Ujjain *akhbar* when it reported 'that a *saees* [groom] who went to cut grass having refused to desist when called on to do so in the name of the new Raja was instantly struck dead'.⁴¹ A similar fate awaited anyone trying to put Lallaji to the test:⁴²

It is stated by a person who has arrived from Agur that a Thakoor of the neighbourhood dressed a young man in female attire and presented him

³⁵ Babaji Atma Ram, Newswriter, Deoguradiya, to Satmahla *vakil* (Mehildpur), received 19 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 65/18 November 1831.

³⁶ Deposition of Pratap Singh, IL, 192/u.

³⁷ Report of Ratanji, encl. in *ibid*, IL, 192/ii; 'Account of Lalla Putel . . . etc.', NAI, FDP, 65/18 November 1831.

³⁸ 'Account of Lalla Putel . . . etc.', NAI, FDP, 65/18 November 1831, *emphasis added*.

³⁹ *Ibid*.

⁴⁰ 'Indore Ukhbars', 25 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 65/18 November 1831.

⁴¹ 'Oujein Ukhbars', 9 September 1831, *ibid*.

⁴² 'Oujein Ukhbars', 19 September 1831, *ibid*.

to the new Raja as a sick woman. The Raja knew in his heart the real state of the case and replied, 'Women are not required here, take her away instantly'. When the Thakoor went out, he discovered that the youth had lost all the characteristic marks of a male and had assumed the body of a female.

The main thrust of Lallaji's political programme was that he had been divinely ordained to put an end to British hegemony. The moment was at hand when the British would be driven out of Malwa, and indeed from Calcutta as well. Lallaji was to be the instrument for accomplishing this task.⁴¹ Lallaji's utterances were unambiguously anti-British. He proclaimed that 'after the Dussera he will not allow a single Englishman to remain even in Calcutta [and] that when he has accomplished this, the world will acknowledge him'.⁴² The supernatural powers of Lallaji had already been revealed and now these would be directed towards expelling the East India Company from Malwa. It would be futile on the part of the British to resist Lallaji, and if they attempted to fight, they would be totally routed. McMahon, in his communication to Borthwick on the morrow of Lallaji's tragic end, made it a point to comment on 'the belief generally and implicitly entertained that this fanatic possessed supernatural powers and that any force proceeding against him, however great, would infallibly be annihilated'.⁴³ The coming Dussehra was to be the auspicious day for the beginning of a new era. Lallaji Patel was, however, only the forerunner of a mythical just ruler, Khande Rao Appa Saheb, who would reveal himself after Dussehra when his (Khande Rao's) reign would commence. An aspect of the mythical Appa Saheb was that he would miraculously appear with an 'Army of Lacks of men', so that Lallaji's own troops 'should have no occasion to fight'.⁴⁴ This millenarian twist was meant to signify to his followers and the people at large that they were on the threshold of a great historical event. Lallaji thereby underlined that he was no small-time rabble-rouser.

IV

Outwardly at least, Lallaji was not trying to overthrow the Sindia state or Sindia rule in the Satmahla. Neither, for that matter, was he seeking to

⁴¹ 'Kotah Ukhbars', 3 September 1831, *ibid.*; 'Nursingurh Ukhbars', n.d., *ibid.*; letter to Shajapur *vakil* at Sehore, n.d., NAI, FDP, 68/18 November 1831; 'he talks in an extravagant manner of a change of Government', same to same, n.d., *ibid.*; '[he] threatens not to leave an English gentleman on this side of Calcutta', letter to Wilkinson, n.d., *ibid.*; Deposition of Pratap Singh, IL, 192/ii; Report of Ratanji, *ibid.*

⁴² Report of Ratanji, IL, 192/ii.

⁴³ McMahon to Borthwick, 1 October 1831, IL, 192/ii.

⁴⁴ Deposition of Pratap Singh, IL, 192/ii.

replace Holkar. The *patel* was reported to have declared that once his raj was established, he would 'transfer it to Holkar or Sindia whichever of the two first attends to pay their respects to him'. With much sarcasm, Borthwick added that Lallaji thinks 'no doubt this is a happy stroke of policy' which 'will infallibly operate as a lure to their Highnesses so powerful as to cause a scramble between them for preeminence in his Godship's favor'.⁴⁵ Thus, Sindia or Holkar, depending on which of the two was eventually chosen to rule, would become agents of Khande Rao. For the moment, it was not clear whether Lallaji would completely withdraw from the day-to-day affairs of the state; what was certain was that Lallaji did not intend to play second fiddle to Sindia/Holkar in any post-Dussehra arrangement.

Of course, he appropriated some of the symbols associated with the indigenous rulers of Malwa, so that he did not really go beyond prevailing notions of kingship. He had already assumed the title 'Alijah Bahadur', which was one of the titles of the Sindia rulers.⁴⁶ Lallaji was more commonly called *naya raja*. He seated himself on a *masnad* or royal seat, had his own imperial tents 'and other kingly apparatus', recruited a personal (*khas*) bodyguard after the manner of Sindia and Holkar, had a *palki* (palanquin) stationed outside his tent, managed to purchase an elephant, had ordered a *chhatra* ('umbrella') from Ujjain and planned 'to have a camp and equipage twice as large' as that of Sindia and Holkar so that they would be suitably overawed when they 'come to wait upon him'.⁴⁷ There was a curious rumour at Ujjain according to which Lallaji had 'sent for a Nugara and Nowbut [royal drums] which had been buried in ancient times and lately dug up about one and a half coss [*kos*] from this place [Ujjain]'.⁴⁸ This reference to two symbols of kingship, *nagara* and *naubat*, discovered at Ujjain, was intended to link the new raja with the main ritual centre of Malwa.

Lallaji had set up his flags and standards as symbols of his authority. He had unfurled eighteen *jhandas* which were supposed to signify eighteen administrative units, or *subas*, to be established in Malwa after Dussehra.⁴⁹ Lallaji had not taken long to master the idiom with which chieftains of northern and central India were familiar. Surajit Sinha has noted the fascination which Rajput and 'pseudo-Rajput' states had for certain numbers

⁴⁵ Borthwick to Wellesley, 27 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 66/18 November 1831.

⁴⁶ Jalal Khan to McMahon, 3 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 65/18 November 1831; McMahon to Wellesley, 18 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 66/18 November 1831; *Kamavisdar*, Sarangpur, to Dewas authorities, received 26 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 65/18 November 1831. Lallaji did not reserve the title 'Alijah Bahadur' for himself, but seems to have frequently used it for the mythical Khande Rao as well.

⁴⁷ Jalal Khan to McMahon, 3 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 65/18 November 1831; 'Oujein Ukhbars', 14 September 1831 and 24 September 1831, *ibid.*; 'Kota Ukhbars', 4 September 1831, *ibid.*; 'Nursingurh Ukhbars', n.d., *ibid.*, Report of Ratanji, IL, 192/11

⁴⁸ 'Oujein Ukhbars', 24 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 65/18 November 1831.

⁴⁹ McMahon to Wellesley, 22 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 66/18 November 1831.

in the context of the administrative division of their states: 'The widespread prevalence of certain conventional numbers such as 12, 84 and 18, in organizing territorial segments of a state indicates a general sharing of ideas throughout Central India'.³⁰ This, in turn, was linked by Sinha to the phenomenon of rajputisation. Lallaji was making a conscious effort to overcome his humble social origins so that his leadership would be acceptable to socially and economically dominant indigenous groups which were likely to look to the Rajput/Maratha paradigm of state formation. The choice of Dussehra as the date for the commencement of the era of Khande Rao (a Maratha name) was not devoid of purport. It is well known that rajputisation in relation to state formation involved, to quote Sinha again, 'patronization of a key symbolic festival (Dussehra, Durga Puja, and so on)'.³¹ This is not to suggest that Lallaji was looking for a short cut to Rajput status, but as he had a large following among the Sondhia and other petty chieftains, these were considerations which could not be entirely ignored. It was not an easy task for a petty village official to be readily accepted as the leader of Sondhia and Rajput zamindars, powerful rebels and armed 'bandits'. Yet, Lallaji did manage to achieve this. One must look at his attempts to seek legitimacy through borrowed symbols in this context. It is in this context that the device of a mythical Khande Rao also makes sense. Though it is not clear as to what precisely Lallaji meant by the formula, 'Khande Rao Appa Saheb', there are a few clues which are worth considering. The sacred name of Khande Rao was closely associated with the Holkar family. Then there was Khande Rao the son of the great Malhar Rao and the husband of Ahilya Bai. He predeceased Malhar Rao, having been killed in battle. Ahilya Bai had ruled the Holkar state as the widow of Khande Rao. As for the honorific Appa Saheb, it was most recently connected with the Bhonsle family. Following the death of Raghoji Bhonsle in 1816, Appa Saheb had become the regent of the Nagpur state. He did not give in to the company and was held captive during the third Anglo-Maratha war. He managed to escape in May 1818, and for some time after that the Pindari leader Chitu collaborated with him. Grant Duff notes that 'Appa Saheb became a rallying point for all the disbanded and broken troops of the country'.³² For several years he was pursued, but never captured, by the British. Appa Saheb tried to enlist the support of various north Indian rulers, including the Sikhs, for launching a struggle against the company's authority. In 1829, about two years before Lallaji's

³⁰ Surajit Sinha, 'State Formation and Rajput Myth in Tribal Central India', Presidential Address, Section of Anthropology and Archaeology, 49th Indian Science Congress, Cuttack, 1962, repr. in H. Kulke, ed., *The State in India, 1000-1700*, Delhi, 1995, p. 334.

³¹ *Ibid.* In this case Dussehra also coincided with the beginning of the dry season, the usual season for military expeditions in the region.

³² James Grant Duff, *History of the Marhattas*, 2 Vols, 4th edition, Bombay, 1878, Vol. II, p. 600.

revolt, he had been granted asylum by the ruler of Jodhpur.³³ The people of north Malwa must have vaguely heard of the presence of Appa Saheb in neighbouring Marwar, so that the significance of Lallaji's reference in his formula to this relentlessly anti-British Bhonsle chief could not have been entirely lost on the inhabitants of Sondhwara.

V

The historical significance of the abortive Sondhwara uprising derives from the extensive popular support and sympathy for the movement. There was more to Lallaji than the appropriation of royal symbols, subversive though this was in itself, or the myth of his supernatural powers. There is no denying that his political scheme was far too grandiose to succeed under the given historical circumstances. Yet, when his talk, at times bordering on the absurd, is shorn of embellishments, Lallaji emerges as a leader who was addressing real problems. It could not have been without reason that ordinary peasants, estimated variously from three to seven thousand, rallied to his banner.³⁴ The manner in which people responded to the Lallaji phenomenon allows us to view, if only for a brief moment, politics and society at the very lowest level in a remote sub-region of Malwa during the early nineteenth century.

It is significant that the *patel* himself was an Ahir, which is indicative of a certain affinity between the Ahirs with their pastoral links, and the Sondhias, the nucleus of Lallaji's movement, who were relative newcomers to settled agriculture in this region. The Sondhias claimed Rajput status, but never made it to the Great Rajput tradition. They stood on the 'farther edges of recognised Rajputhood', the 'so-called "spurious" Rajputs, whose "rajputisation" never seemed fully achieved'.³⁵ John Malcolm refers to them as a 'mixed race'.³⁶ Raghubir Singh, an authority on the history of Malwa, who also happened to be scion of the Rathor rulers of Sitamau, distinguished between two categories of Malwa Rajputs: (i) those settled in Malwa since the seventh–eighth centuries, who had become intermixed with the local population giving rise to 'intermixed races' such as the Sondhias and Bhilalas; and (ii) Rajputs who settled in Malwa during the Mughal period. It was the latter group, which 'did not intermarry nor . . . take to agriculture',³⁷ that obviously belonged to the Great Rajput tradition.

In the latter half of the eighteenth century, once Maratha rule had stabilised in most of Malwa proper, the Mandsaur area became the base for

³³ G.S. Sardesai, *New History of the Marathas*, Vol. III, Bombay, 1948, p. 477.

³⁴ Cf. Jalal Khan to McMahon, 3 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 65/18 November 1831; McMahon to Wellesley, 24 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 66/18 November 1831.

³⁵ Cf. Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput*, p. 72.

³⁶ Malcolm, *Memoir*, Vol. I, p. 511.

³⁷ Raghubir Singh, *Malwa in Transition. The First Phase, 1698–1765*, Bombay, 1936, pp. 11–12.

Maratha offensive in south-eastern Rajasthan and in the northern Malwa territories lying beyond the core area of Maratha control. The core area extended from the Narmada in the south to Mandsaur in the north. In Mandsaur district, territory had come to be shared mainly between Sindia and Holkar by the turn of the century.³³ At the beginning of the century, Mandsaur itself, Kiampur, Sawakhara, Jawad, Jiran and Nimach were subject to Sindia.³⁴ The administrative and revenue organisation of Mandsaur pargana was probably the most stable of the various Sindia or other Maratha territories in Malwa. The family of Appa Gangadhar had managed this pargana as Sindia's *kamavisdars* continuously almost since the middle of the eighteenth century.³⁵ In this district, Rampura, Garot, Chandwasa, Kanjarda, Kukreshwar, Manasa, Narayangarh and Antri were some of the Holkar parganas.³⁶ Other than Sindia and Holkar, there were two chieftains of some consequence with territories in the district: the Rathor raja of Sitamau and the nawab of Jaora. Sitamau was a tributary of Sindia.³⁷

In a bid to extend their sphere of influence beyond Malwa into Rajasthan, Mahadji Sindia and Ahilya Bai/Tukoji Holkar, frequently assisted by the energetic Zalim Singh, continuously made demands on neighbouring Udaipur and Jaipur. Whenever possible, they converted tributary obligations into territorial annexation. Rajrana Zalim Singh, hereditary *faujdar* and subsequently de facto ruler of Kota for over four decades, played a pivotal role in Maratha strategy in south-eastern Rajasthan and northern Malwa. He was the usual choice for dealing with the Rajasthan states in this area on behalf of the Marathas. Moreover, he pioneered settlement in the outlying areas of upper Sondhwara. We find him constantly mediating disputes, assisting Sindia and Holkar in the collection of revenue, pushing forward the frontiers of settled agriculture, and mobilising/recruiting troops from amongst the local population. Zalim Singh had an intimate connection with Sondhwara. Holkar had entrusted him with the management of

³³ Unless otherwise specified, 'district' refers to present day districts and district boundaries.

³⁴ Capt. F. Dangerfield, Surveying Officer, to John Malcolm, 3 October 1820, NAI, Separate Revenue Branch Consultations, 18/1 December 1820 (this consultation henceforth, DR), W. Hamilton, *East India Gazetteer*, 2 Vols, London, 1828, Vol. II, p. 34; C.E. Luard and D.N. Sheopuri, *Gwalior State Gazetteer, The Central India State Gazetteer Series*, Vol. I, Calcutta, 1908, pp. 245-46, 265, 275 and 293 (hereafter *Gwalior Gazetteer*).

³⁵ John Malcolm, *Report on the Province of Malwa and Adjoining Districts*, 11 February 1821, Calcutta, 1927, p. 287; Malcolm, *Memour*, Vol. II, p. 247. On Appa Gangadhar, see Amar Farooqui, 'Opium enterprise and colonial intervention in Malwa and western India, 1800-1824', *IESHR*, Vol. 32(4), 1995, p. 470.

³⁶ DR; Malcolm, *Memour*, Vol. II, p. 512; Hamilton, *Gazetteer*, Vol. I, pp. 396 and 622; Vol. II, p. 257; C.E. Luard and R.P. Dube, *Indore State Gazetteer, The Central India State Gazetteer Series*, Vol. II, Calcutta, 1908, pp. 244, 253, 274, 287 and 297, *Madhya Pradesh Gazetteers, Indore District*, Bhopal, 1971, p. 80.

³⁷ Malcolm, *Memour*, Vol. II, p. 248; C.E. Luard, *The Central India State Gazetteer Series*, Vol. V, Part A, *Western States (Malwa) Gazetteer*, Bombay, 1908 (hereafter, *Malwa Gazetteer*), section, 'Sitamau'; M.S. Ranawat, Introduction to *Keshavadas Abhilekhagar Puralekhya Samagri ka Suchi Patra*, Part I, Sitamau, 1991, n.p.

the Chaumahla (Charmahals, i.e., four mahals), while Sindia had rented out the adjoining Satmahla to the rajrana. In the south-eastern corner of Mandsaur district, a small portion of Malwa comprising Awar, Dag, Gangdhar and Pachpahar—collectively referred to as Chaumahla—lies in the neighbouring Jhalawar district of Rajasthan.⁶³ Under the Mughals, Pachpahar was part of sarkar Gagraun. Zalim Singh had made Gagraun, on the Kali Sindh river; lying at the edge of a dense forest, his main residence,⁶⁴ confining the Khichi Rajputs who had at one time inhabited this area further south near Khilchipur.⁶⁵

Chaumahla has a rather chequered past. It was attached to Kota, the tribute of which state was divided between Holkar and Sindia in 1744. By the 1780s, the annual tribute from Chaumahla was granted to Holkar, who in turn farmed out the dues to Zalim Singh. After 1818, Holkar was forced by the British to give up his claim to Chaumahla. Awar, Dag, Gangdhar and Pachpahar were handed over to Zalim Singh who had managed this tract very efficiently. To the south of Chaumahla, Holkar's Mehidpur pargana was reputed to be among the best managed and most productive of Holkar possessions, 'and when the adjoining Pergunnah of Gangrar [Gangdhar] was held by Holkar, the two formed a rich and luxuriant tract of country'.⁶⁶ Chaumahla was regarded as more of a personal acquisition by the rajrana and constituted the nucleus of the Jhalawar state which formally came into being in 1838 and was ruled by the descendants of Zalim Singh.⁶⁷ Significantly, Lallaji's uprising more or less bypassed the Sondhia stronghold of Chaumahla,⁶⁸ or, at least was not sufficiently serious here although the rebels were very active in the neighbouring Holkar parganas of Machalpur and Zirapur (district Rajgarh). These parganas were sandwiched between Satmahla in the west and Khilchipur in the east.

⁶³ Cf. *Jhalawar Settlement Report, 1885*, p. 1.

⁶⁴ James Tod, Political Agent, Western Rajputana, to C.T. Metcalfe, Secretary, Govt. of India, 12 March 1820, NAI, FDP, 15/22 April 1820.

⁶⁵ Cf. 'Memoranda Regarding the Petty States of Oomutwara . . . etc.', Letters from Agent, Bhopal, 7 July 1820, NAI, FD, Central India Agency, Extracts (hereafter CIA), file no. 36. Khilchipur (district Rajgarh), in the northern part of the district, was a petty Rajput principality. Sindia claimed tribute from the Chauhan rulers of this petty state. Malcolm, *Report*, p. 339; Hamilton, *Gazetteer*, Vol. II, p. 617; *Gwalior Gazetteer*, p. 292; *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Oxford, 1907-08, Vol. XV, pp. 277-78.

⁶⁶ R.N. Hamilton, 'Narrative of the Principal Events of the Holkar State from 1837', n.d., NAI, FD Misc., 327, p. 86.

⁶⁷ H.B. Abbott, *Jhalawar Gazetteer, The Rajputana Gazetteer*, Vol. II, Calcutta, 1879, pp. 186, 188, 204, 285; B.N. Dhoundryal, *Rajasthan District Gazetteers, Jhalawar*, Jaipur, 1964, pp. 1-2; Savitri Gupta, *Rajasthan District Gazetteers, Kota*, Jaipur, 1982, pp. 37 and 39; M.L. Sharma, *Kota Rajya ka Itihasa*, 2 Vols, Kota, Samvat 1996, Vol. II, p. 509; S.C. Misra, *Sindhia-Holkar Rivalry in Rajasthan*, Delhi, 1981, pp. 17, 19 and 188.

⁶⁸ At the time of the 1831 revolt Chaumahla was technically a part of Kota. According to the *Jhalawar Settlement Report* of 1885, Sondhias held 78 per cent of the land in Chaumahla. *Jhalawar Settlement Report*, p. 22.

Satmahla denoted the seven mahals of Susner, Nalkhera, Soyat, Kanad, Piplon, Barod and Ghusai Basai. Susner, Nalkhera and Soyat are in the Susner tahsil of Shajapur district; Kanad, Piplon and Barod are in the Agar tahsil of the same district. Ghusai Basai, detached from the main block of the Satmahla parganas, is in Mandsaur.⁶⁶ The hills of the lesser Vindhyan range, or the so-called northern Vindhyan range, extend across the Satmahla. These hills, 'generally ignored in the physiographic descriptions of the country', do have an impact in the context of a smaller territorial unit. They run along the western boundary of Susner tahsil and the south-eastern part of Agar tahsil.⁶⁷ Almost semi-arid climatic conditions prevail in the area. In the Satmahla, an inferior cereal, jowar, is the staple food 'irrespective of rich and poor in the rural areas'.⁶⁸ Unlike the villages of adjoining districts where wheat and maize are the staples, jowar and maize are the mainstay of the Satmahla diet.⁶⁹ For a long time, Sindia had farmed out these mahals to Zalim Singh.⁷⁰ Given the historical background of the Satmahla, Sindia hold over it at the time of Lallaji's revolt could at best have been tenuous.

Most of what is now Shajapur district was held by the Sindias.⁷¹ The gazetteer of the Gwalior state compiled at the turn of the present century noted with reference to Sindia's Shajapur zila, with which the Satmahla had been merged, that 'the Sondhias are peculiar to this tract, living around Agar and Mehidpur. They are of semi-Rajput origin . . . [and] are still prone to cattle lifting'.⁷² According to the gazetteer, the zila had a population of 19,136 Sondhias, as compared to, among others, a little more than 20,000 Brahmans, roughly the same number of Chamars, and 7,717 Gujars. 25,948 persons were recorded as speaking the Sondhwara dialect of the Sondhias. The gazetteer commented that 'unless pressed, they [the Sondhias] invariably state that they are Rajputs', making it difficult to arrive at an accurate figure for the Sondhia population.⁷³

⁶⁶ Cf. *Gwalior Gazetteer*, Part iii, Village List, p. 281, also *Gwalior Gazetteer*, Part i, map.

⁶⁷ A. M. Sinha, *Madhya Pradesh Gazetteers, District Shajapur*, Bhopal, 1994, p. 3.

⁶⁸ *Shajapur Gazetteer*, p. 57.

⁶⁹ *Census of India, 1981, Madhya Pradesh, District Handbook, XIII-A, Shajapur District*, pp. 56-57.

⁷⁰ Revenue accounts pertaining to the Satmahla are contained in the records of the Gulgule family which represented Maratha interests (both Sindia and Holkar) in the area, and in certain other parts of north-western Malwa, during the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century. The Gulgules acted in concert with Zalim Singh, to whom a number of letters contained in the Gulgule *daftar* are addressed. Circa 1810, the *ijara* (farm) for the seven mahals is stated to be Rs 3,19,308. Letter dated 28 July 1810, Sri Nat Nagar Shodh Samathan, Sitamau, Gulgule *daftar*, Vol. IX, No. 213. See also, Malcolm, *Report*, pp. 333 and 339; *Gwalior Gazetteer*, pp. 198, 251, 271, 288 and 294.

⁷¹ DR; Hamilton, *Gazetteer*, Vol. II, p. 528; *Gwalior Gazetteer*, p. 306.

⁷² *Gwalior Gazetteer*, p. 172.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

The situation on the eastern and southern fringe of the Satmahals was much more complex. A large part of this area, which was on the Sindia border and on the outskirts of Holkar's outlying possessions (Machalpur, Zirapur), is now in district Rajgarh. In Rajgarh district, Sondhwara and Khilchipur overlap the Umatwara portion of Malwa. Umatwara contained two Rajput principalities, Rajgarh and Narsinghgarh. The ruling families of the two states were closely related to each other.⁷⁷ Rajgarh paid tribute to Sindia, while Narsinghgarh was a tributary of Holkar. Pratap Singh, who had been the diwan of the Narsinghgarh raja, was to become the most prominent adherent of Lallaji Patel.⁷⁸ The tributary obligations of Rajgarh to the Sindia state continued after 1818, so that the Sindias maintained a financial presence in Umatwara. Kota also received a nominal tribute from this area. The comparatively recent nomadic/pastoral past of Umatwara is reflected in some of the local traditions recorded by British officials who came in contact with Rajgarh and Narsinghgarh in the early nineteenth century. One such tradition was that the Umats, 'who during the prosperity of the Mughal Empire were proprietors of large herds of camels', had tamed the *nilgai* and stag 'which, for want of horses, they used when on predatory excursions'.⁷⁹ Between them, the Sondhias and Umats specialised in eking a living out of the relatively poor soil of this zone. Incidentally, a large part of north Rajgarh district is a marginal area from the point of view of agriculture due to its terrain which comprises low stony hills.⁸⁰

During their heydays, the Pindaris had appropriated space for themselves in the 'frontier' Sondhwara/Umatwara/Ahirwara tract. Sindia and Holkar preferred to confine to Pindaris to this area, at some distance from the core of their territory. Prior to the third Anglo-Maratha war, Sindia's Rajgarh tribute had been allotted to the Pindari chief Chitu, whereas the Narsinghgarh tribute due to Holkar was received by Karim Khan.⁸¹

The prominent eastern Malwa towns, Shajapur and Shujalpur in district Shajapur, and Sarangpur and Talen in district Rajgarh were in an intermediate zone between Sondhwara and the core Sindia-Holkar territory. These urban centres stood in a very fertile and long-settled part of Malwa.⁸²

⁷⁷ DR, *Malwa Gazetteer*, pp. 113-14.

⁷⁸ The use of the title 'diwan' can be a little confusing in the context of Narsinghgarh, the ruler of which state was, for historical reasons which it is not necessary to go into over here, referred to as 'diwan' rather than 'raja'.

⁷⁹ Cf. letter to Government of India, (1818?), NAI, FD, CIA, Bhopal Letter Book B 1, Issues to Govt. no. 73, file no. 45.

⁸⁰ Cf. *Census, 1981, Rajgarh District Handbook*, p. xxi.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*; Capt. William Henley, Agent, Eastern Malwa, to J. Stewart, Resident, Gwalior, 19 February 1819, NAI, FD, CIA, file no. 45; G. Sydenham, Agent, Berar, 'Memorandum respecting the Pindarnes towards the end of the year 1814', 15 October 1814, NAI, FD Misc., 124, p. 51.

⁸² Cf. Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, Lucknow, Nawal Kishore edition, Vol. II, pp. 98-99, Irfan Habib, *An Atlas of The Mughal Empire*, Delhi, 1982, p. 34.

With the collapse of the *peshwa's* authority in eastern Malwa, Sindia, Holkar, Rajgarh, Narsingharh and the Pindaris had stepped in and imposed claims on these towns and the neighbouring countryside. Thus, Sarangpur and Shujalpur were for some time controlled by Karim Khan Pindari.⁶⁵ While the going was good, Rajgarh and Narsingharh had been able to extract tribute from Sarangpur, Shajapur, Shujalpur, Talen and some parts of Satmahla.⁶⁶ Talen, and its adjoining villages which had a large Sondhia population, was shared by Rajgarh with Sindia and Holkar. The East India Company briefly administered this city after the third Anglo-Maratha war during which it had been taken away from Rajgarh. Talen had acquired great strategic importance when it was chosen as the residence of Sindia and Holkar agents appointed to collect the Rajgarh-Narsingharh tribute. At the time of Lallaji's revolt, it was under the Sindias though Rajgarh had not given up its claim to the city. Here, too, there was a Kota factor: the Talen pargana had been farmed to Seth Bahadur Mal, the leading *sahukar* of Kota at the time.⁶⁷

Shujalpur had changed hands several times. From the *peshwa* it had passed to Sindia, thence to Rajgarh and the Pindaris. Sindia had been directed by the *peshwa* to hand over control of the city to the British,⁶⁸ who got possession of it after 1818. For over a decade after that, the Shujalpur pargana was partitioned, primarily between the Sindias and the British. Throughout the 1820s, eastern Shujalpur was directly under the agent to the governor-general stationed in eastern Malwa (Sehore). In 1831, the company's officials were working out modalities for the transfer of eastern Shujalpur to Sindia. They admitted that British Shujalpur had been heavily overassessed, leading to great hardship for the peasantry and the various intermediaries.⁶⁹ Although Shujalpur does not seem to have been directly affected by the 1831 movement, conditions prevailing in the Shujalpur countryside at the time of Lallaji's uprising should not be lost sight of.

The extreme backwardness of this part of Malwa is revealed in the almost total absence of literacy even in a relatively more developed urban centre like Shujalpur. L. Wilkinson, political agent in eastern Malwa, in a lengthy report on Shujalpur penned around the time of Lallaji's revolt, made a pointed reference to the fact that 'there is not a single Brahman a

⁶⁵ James Tod on Pindaris, October 1811, NAI, FD Misc., 124, pp. 8, 13-14. Sydenham, 'Memorandum', *ibid.*, p. 50; B.K. Sinha, *The Pindaris*, Calcutta, 1971, p. 8.

⁶⁶ Letter to Government of India (18187), Bhopal Letter Book B 1, *Issues* to Govt., no. 73, NAI, FD, CIA, file no. 45; N. Alves, Political Agent, Eastern Malwa, to W.B. Martin, Resident, Indore, 29 October 1833, *ibid.*; Henley to Stewart, 11 April 1819, IL, 192/ii.

⁶⁷ 'Account of receipts of revenue from Tullein . . . etc', 17 April 1823, NAI, FD, CIA, file no. 45; Alves to Martin, 29 October 1833, *ibid.*; L. Wilkinson, Political Agent, Bhopal, to Col. Speirs, Offg. Resident, Gwalior, 5 February 1841, *ibid.*

⁶⁸ Lord Hastings, Governor-General, to Secret Committee, Court of Directors, 1 March 1820, *Papers Respecting the Pindary and Mahratta Wars*, NAI, FD Misc., 124/A, p. 403.

⁶⁹ Henley to Stewart, 11 April 1819, 192/ii; Wilkinson, to Robinson, 1 December 1831, *ibid.*; also NAI, FD, CIA, 'Shujawulpur', file no. 16.

native of this or the adjoining Pergunnahs who even makes any pretensions to a knowledge of Sanskrit. There are a few Hindoos (*Kayuts*) and Musulmans who brought up at the headquarters of Kureem Khan the Pindaree chief can read and write Persian but except in Bhopal, where there are a few Moulvees who have come chiefly from other parts of India [,] there is no Mussulman of learning with the exception of two men (the Kazi's son and a choudree of Shujawulpoor). Elsewhere, particularly in the villages, 'accounts are kept in Hindee (here called 'Rangaree' [Rangri] or Jungul language) but it has been so little cultivated that no two Putwarees would write the same word in the same manner. Every writer has a mode of orthography peculiar to himself'.⁸ That Wilkinson was not wide off the mark can be gauged from recent statistics pertaining to literacy rates in the Shajapur district. According to the 1981 census the literacy rate for the district was 23.73 per cent, as against the state figure of 27.87 per cent. In 1971, literacy in Shajapur was a mere 18.98 per cent.⁹

VI

As news about Lallaji penetrated the *qasbas* and countryside of Sondhwara, ordinary folk, reckoned in thousands by contemporary observers, began undertaking a pilgrimage to Deoguradiya. Wellesley was informed that 'crowds are daily flocking to pay their respects to this Naya Rajah'.¹⁰ When Khoob Chund, an inhabitant of Sehore, travelled from his residence to Deoguradiya, going via Shujalpur and Sarangpur, he witnessed 'thousands of men, women and children travelling on the same road'. At Nalkhera, he came across 'a very large multitude' of 'about 5 or 6 thousand people'.¹¹ At the camp, 'the crowd was great and pressing for a sight of the Putel'.¹²

The large scale movement of 'people from 100 kos' around, 'daily coming to wait upon him'¹³ in the wake of rumours of Lallaji's miracles, was the earliest sign of an upheaval. This to and fro traffic, which became pronounced in the first week of September, could hardly have gone unnoticed. The spectacle of multitudes of poor villagers, who probably ventured on the journey in large groups, could not have been a reassuring sight for officials of the indigenous states. In the reports they were sending their superiors, they appear at a loss as to what to make of the tumult.

⁸ Wilkinson to Robinson, 1 December 1831, IL, 192/ii (hereafter Wilkinson, Shujalpur Report). Rangri is one of the derivatives of the Malwi dialect of Rajasthan. It is mixed up with a large number of Marwari words. Cf. *Imperial Gazetteer*, Vol. IX, p. 351.

⁹ *Census, 1981, Shajapur District Handbook*, p. xxviii.

¹⁰ McMahon to Wellesley, 18 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 66/18 November 1831.

¹¹ Deposition of Khoob Chund Bhamin, encl. in Wilkinson to Robinson, 2 December 1831, IL, 192/ii.

¹² *Ibid*

¹³ Report of Ratanji, IL, 192/ii.

With limited means at their disposal, several groups would have been travelling either on foot, or if they could manage it, on carts, at a slow and leisurely pace. This must have helped in arousing curiosity among onlookers, further diffusing information about the miracle-performing raja. Lallaji's headquarters soon became a bustling mini township. A large bazar had sprung up at the site to cater to the needs of the huge congregation. Jalal Khan, in his report of 3 September, observed that there were 'nearly 300 tents belonging to sahookars and traders'.⁹⁴ There were a large number of 'jatrawalas', probably a reference to wandering minstrels.⁹⁵ Then, there were several tents belonging to Lallaji himself with all the attendant paraphernalia. A lamp was kept burning in one of the tents, guarded by sepoy who 'prevented the crowd from approaching it'.⁹⁶ The flame represented Khande Rao, 'and when the man is inspired by Khande Rao Deota he seats himself before the lamp'.⁹⁷ Merchants dealing in horses, mares, camels and weapons were doing good business at the camp. Lallaji himself had been purchasing 'spears and accoutrements etc., and other good articles coming from abroad'.⁹⁸ The pace at which the *patel* was buying horses had pushed up prices of the animal in the area. McMahon found to his dismay that 'it is with difficulty we can fill up vacancies, the prices have increased, indeed they have doubled'.⁹⁹

Many of those who flocked to Lallaji's camp came in search of remedies for ailments afflicting them or their relatives; others were just satisfied with a sight of the great man. The medical role of Lallaji gradually became secondary and seems to have eventually ceased altogether. Increasingly, the pilgrimage became an expression of loyalty to the cause of Lallaji. Those individuals who could afford it made token offerings, usually in cash. While all offerings which added to Lallaji's resources were welcome, politically it were the donations made by *kamavisdars*, zamindars and village *patels* that were more important. These were an affirmation of faith in the leadership of Lallaji. 'Thousands of rupees come in presents', noted the Agar *kamavisdar*;¹⁰⁰ and according to the Shajapur *wakil* at Sehore, 'by taking from 5 to 16 Rupees from each village, he has accumulated a large sum of money'.¹⁰¹ One estimate was that Lallaji received 'gifts to the value

⁹⁴ Jalal Khan to McMahon, 3 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 65/18 November 1831. The Sarangpur *kamavisdar* stated that 'About four or five hundred Bunyas shops are set up in his camp'. *Kamavisdar*, Sarangpur, to Dewas authorities, 26 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 65/18 November 1831.

⁹⁵ Report of Ratanji, IL, 192/ii.

⁹⁶ Deposition of Khoob Chund, IL, 192/ii.

⁹⁷ 'Kotah Ukhbars', 4 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 65/18 November 1831.

⁹⁸ Report of Ratanji, IL, 192/ii.

⁹⁹ McMahon to Wellealey, 18 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 66/18 November 1831.

¹⁰⁰ Raoji Ganesh to Sindia's *wakil* at Indore, received 22 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 65/18 November 1831.

¹⁰¹ Letter to Shajapur *wakil* at Sehore, n.d., NAI, FDP, 68/18 November 1831.

of 1,000 or 1,100 Rupees daily'.¹⁰² Pratap Singh, who was part of Lallaji's inner circle, stated at his trial, where he was trying to play down the importance of the entire affair, that 'whilst I was there, the daily income was about 500 Rupees, sometimes only 200 Rupees a day and sometimes even 700'.¹⁰³ The offerings were described as *nazars*, or tribute, with the implied meaning of accepting political overlordship. Thus, 'everybody presented nuzurs and went on. Each putel presented 5 Rupees and a coconut on behalf of his village and poor putels whatever they could afford'.¹⁰⁴ Whole villages had 'subscribed in making contributions to him'.¹⁰⁵ Lallaji had enlisted the support of 'sirdars of petty forts', as well as of 'kumavishdars [*sic*] of the neighbourhood, Pundits and Hakims of Kanur, Nulkhera, Soosnere, Sarangpoor and Agur'.¹⁰⁶ Village *patels* and petty zamindars were expected to present at least five rupees each; *amils*, *kamavisdars* and other pargana-level officials were expected to pay tribute at the rate of sixteen rupees. In practice, the rate for the latter category might have been between ten and sixteen rupees.¹⁰⁷ Pratap Singh, in keeping with his status as the former diwan of Narsinghgarh, had presented a palanquin to Lallaji.¹⁰⁸ At his trial, Pratap Singh accepted the charge that he had presented a *palki* to Lallaji, but denied that this had any political meaning. He insisted that the gift was an expression of his gratitude towards Lallaji for having restored his ailing son to health.¹⁰⁹

Some of the funds were used to distribute alms or to give 'each visitor 12 pice weight of flour from which a good meal can be made' or for meeting the costs of the bandobast and elaborate ceremonial which was crucial to legitimising Lallaji's status.¹¹⁰ However, the major part of the collection was earmarked for the support of armed retainers.

In a communication of 18 September, Jalal Khan reported that Lallaji had already bought 60 horses. Babaji Atma Ram, Sindia's newswriter posted at Deoguradiya, placed the number of horses bought recently by the *patel* at 30. Lallaji had paid Rs 300 each for 25 of these horses. Eventually, the tally of the *naya* raja's personal (*khas*) horsemen was 55–60. His infantry comprised 100–150 foot. In addition, there were the 25 mounted

¹⁰² Letter to Wilkinson, n.d., NAI, FDP, 68/18 November 1831.

¹⁰³ Deposition of Pratap Singh, IL, 192/ii.

¹⁰⁴ Deposition of Khoob Chund, IL, 192/ii.

¹⁰⁵ Wilkinson to Wellesley, 24 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 68/18 November 1831.

¹⁰⁶ Deposition of Pratap Singh, IL, 192/ii.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *Kamavisdar*, Sarangpur, to Dewas authorities, received 26 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 65/18 November 1831.

¹⁰⁸ Jalal Khan to McMahon, 18 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 65/18 November 1831; 'Pratap Sing has presented him with a Palkee and Bearers', Babaji Atma Ram to Satmahla *wakil*, 19 September 1831, *ibid*.

¹⁰⁹ Deposition of Pratap Singh, IL, 192/ii.

¹¹⁰ 'Nurangurh Ukhbars', n.d., NAI, FDP, 65/18 November 1831; 'Oujein Ukhbars', 26 September 1831, *ibid*.

retainers of Pratap Singh; 17–25 sawars of the Sondhia outlaws Puddum and Newul; and 12–15 horses brought by Kalyan Singh, son of the zamindar of Sundarsi. Towards the end of the month, the strength of Lallaji's cavalry was roughly 150 horse.¹¹¹ We are not sure whether this includes the followers of another Sondhia chief, Upjee, son of the thakur of Kalsea, to whom an appeal had been made by Lallaji Patel, but who probably committed himself only at the last moment.

The retainers who entered Lallaji's service with their own horse were paid at the rate of Rs 13 per month; the trained foot soldiers at the rate of Rs 3 per month.¹¹² On the eve of the engagement with McMahon, 60 Pindaris from the Bhopal state were reported to have joined Lallaji's forces, as well as 200 Arabs who had come from Gujarat 'disguised as merchants'.¹¹³ Commenting on these latecomers to the cause, Borthwick remarked; 'parties join him one day and leave him the next according as their expectations are raised or disappointed'.¹¹⁴

The ability of Lallaji to raise funds reflects general acceptance of his claim to leadership. On the whole, the contributions seem to have been voluntary, though one cannot rule out the possibility of a certain element of coercion. By the second week of September, the authority of Lallaji was widely recognised in Sondhwara. He deputed his officials to announce that henceforth dues were to be paid to his regime. The Sindia and Holkar revenue arrangements were no longer valid. This was the most subversive aspect of the movement. Contributions were being levied from villages in Satmahla, Zirapur, Machalpur, Agar, Mehidpur, Narsingharh and Shajapur. Lallaji had threatened to take immediate possession of Nalkhera which had 'occasioned some uneasiness to the Amildar'.¹¹⁵ The *karnavisdars* of Mehidpur and Tarana (in Holkar territory) 'represented that the new Raja had sent injunctions to the different villages not to pay the revenue instalments to the Amils, for Appa Saheb Aleajah would shew himself at the Dusserah and receive the collections';¹¹⁶ 'the Suwars of the new Raja demanded a nuzranah from the zumeendar of Turanah who replied that a contribution had already been sent'.¹¹⁷ Lallaji had 'sent men to prevent the payment of revenue in the Mehidpur district'.¹¹⁸ By the third week of

¹¹¹ Jalal Khan to McMahon, 3 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 65/18 November 1831; same to same, 18 September 1831, *ibid.*, Babaji Atmaram to Satmahla *wakil*, received 19 September 1831, *ibid.*; McMahon to Wellesley, 24 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 66/18 November 1831; Letter to Wilkinson, n.d., NAI, FDP, 68/18 November 1831; Deposition of Pratap Singh, IL, 192/ii.

¹¹² Cf. Deposition of Pratap Singh, IL, 192/ii.

¹¹³ McMahon to Wellesley, 22 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 66/18 November 1831; Borthwick to Wellesley, 26 September 1831, *ibid.*; same to same, 27 September 1831, *ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Borthwick to Wellesley, 27 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 66/18 November 1831.

¹¹⁵ Borthwick to Wellesley, 27 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 66/18 November 1831.

¹¹⁶ 'Indore Ukhbars', 24 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 65/18 November 1831.

¹¹⁷ 'Indore Ukhbars', 25 September 1831, *ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

September, a confident Lallaji had even begun encroaching upon revenue administration in the core areas of Sindia territory. News arrived on the 24th that 'the new Raja had sent directions to the Ruyuts of Oujein not to pay rent to the Amil as the Raja would receive it himself at the time of collecting the revenue instalment'. Lallaji must have been further emboldened upon learning that 'five horsemen were sent in pursuit of the men who brought these orders but were unsuccessful'.¹¹⁹ Lallaji's growing assertiveness on the question of revenue dues, which he insisted should not be paid to the Sindia and Holkar appointees, soon manifested itself in attempts to terrorise officials by resorting to violence. When Uma Dutt, a revenue official, went to Shajapur to collect dues, accompanied by five horsemen, his path was blocked by 'five or six mounted Sondiah robbers'. The Sondhia sawars were 'joined by 5 more robbers and, having turned upon Ooma Dutt's party, they killed one of his men and wounded all the rest with stones'. Uma Dutt had to beat a hasty retreat and, in the process, lost three of his horses. These horses were subsequently sighted in the camp of Lallaji.¹²⁰ The horses of a certain Bhagmull Chowdhree were similarly carried away by force.¹²¹ Wilkinson informed the Indore resident that according to his reports 'five horses stolen from the Shahjahanpoor Pergunnah, three of them belonging to Sindiah's Paga [bodyguard], have been recognized among Laljee Putel's Suwars. One of them was carried off after murdering the owner'.¹²²

The raja ordered peasants throughout Sondhwara 'not to pay rent to anyone but him'. With the inauguration of Khande Rao's reign after Dussehra, revenue dues were to be collected at the rate of '3 Rupees a Bigah for opium and 1 rupee for other produce'.¹²³ They were promised 'a remission of 4 Rupees in the revenue instalment'.¹²⁴ Whether or not the peasants were convinced of the rebel regime's viability, they saw immediately the chance they had been offered to keep revenue collectors at bay: 'The Ryuts have refused to pay their arrears and say they will settle accounts at the Dussehra'.¹²⁵ Mahajans and sahukars were reported to be in a state of panic. They 'had taken alarm, and declined being security for the cultivators', almost bringing the revenue machinery to a standstill since the role of the bankers and moneylenders was central to realising revenue dues.¹²⁶

¹¹⁹ 'Oujein Ukhbars', 24 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 65/18 November 1831.

¹²⁰ 'Durkhast presented by Sindiah's Valkeel', n.d., tr. enclosed in Wilkinson to Wellesley, 24 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 68/18 November.

¹²¹ *Ibid*

¹²² Wilkinson to Wellesley, 24 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 68/18 November 1831.

¹²³ 'Indore Ukhbars', 25 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 65/18 November 1831. On differential rates for opium and other crops in Holkar territories see, Farooqui, 'Opium enterprise', p. 459.

¹²⁴ 'Oujein Ukhbars', 12 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 65/18 November 1831.

¹²⁵ McMahon to Wellesley, 18 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 66/18 November 1831.

¹²⁶ 'Indore Ukhbars', 24 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 65/18 November 1831.

What made Lallaji Patel so formidable was the active involvement of petty warrior chiefs and armed rebels with his movement. The residency at Indore in conveying its assessment of the uprising to the government of India underlined the cooperation extended to Lallaji by 'plunderers . . . who formed part of the Band of Insurgents who joined the Late Impostor in Soandwara'.¹²⁷ While many of these 'plunderers' were 'Inhabitants of that District' several came 'from the adjoining province of Meywar, in the Oudeypore territory, where all are sure to find refuge and protection when driven out of Malwa'.¹²⁸ In a lengthy comment on the problem which Lallaji Patel had highlighted, the acting resident at Indore stated:¹²⁹

It is seldom that Western Malwa in particular has ever been entirely free from the incursions of these marauders, though it is only since they were congregated in support of the Impostor, that they appear to have become so much troublesome and daring. Scarcely a month had elapsed from the time of putting down that insurrection, when accounts were brought of their infesting the highways and committing all sorts of outrages and depredations on persons and property. Being in general well-mounted and armed and in considerable bodies, they were for the most part enabled to set at defiance the local authorities.

Lallaji's biggest catch was Pratap Singh Solanki, former diwan of Narsingharh. The *naya* raja had appointed Pratap Singh 'the chief administrator of his affairs'. He 'enjoyed the fullest confidence of the Putel, was always at his side consulting and advising him whilst the others who had brought small parties were kept at a distance'.¹³⁰ Pratap Singh had quietly left the battlefield when his leader fell and was soon captured. He was tried at Sehore, headquarters of the political agent for eastern Malwa and suffered incarceration briefly. The proceedings of the trial, which is what the British preferred to call these proceedings presuming that they had a right to try a subject of Narsingharh who had committed an 'offence' in Sindia/Holkar territories, provide much useful information about the revolt.

Pratap Singh, about ten years Lallaji's senior, held a jagir in Narsingharh yielding Rs 4,000 per annum. He became the premier official of Narsingharh c. 1826-27. He was dismissed after a year, apparently due to differences with the new ruler of the state, Hanwant Singh, who succeeded Sobhag Singh in 1827. Pratap Singh retained his jagir but began facing financial problems. This seems to have prompted him to join Lallaji with armed

¹²⁷ Acting resident, Indore, to Government of India, 19 February 1832, NAI, FD Misc., IL, 193

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Wilkinson to Robinson, 18 January 1832, NAI, FD Misc., IL, 193

retainers and a number of Sondhias, among whom he had a large following. He was given the rank of commander of 500 horse by Lallaji and allegedly promised the *kamavisdari* of Umatwara.¹²¹ Wilkinson appraised him as 'a man of considerable influence in the neighbourhood and great intelligence. The example of such a man as was to be expected did I know serve to mislead many who would otherwise have hesitated before they joined the Putel's camp'. Moreover, 'the experience which Prutapjee must have acquired as the Nursingurh Raja's Dewan must have taught him something of the arts of collecting and organizing men'.¹²² Pratap Singh was thus a key player in Lallaji's scheme.

Lallaji strengthened his position by inviting powerful armed rebels and zamindars of Sondhwara to join him. We have the names of some of those who responded favourably: Kalyan Singh, Puddum, Newul, Mawa, Ram Singh and Upjee. While Pratap Singh was captured a few weeks after the ill-fated uprising, Upjee, Puddum, Newul and Mawa continued to harass the authorities in Sondhwara.¹²³ Though these rebels are frequently described as 'plunderers', we are actually dealing with a group which had been finding it difficult to hold on to intermediate rights derived from control over land and positions in village- and pargana-level revenue administration. After 1818, it had become difficult for the Sondhwara zamindars and village intermediaries to negotiate terms with indigenous rulers. The process of negotiation was an ongoing one in this frontier area where customary rights and dues may not have been as well defined as in other parts of Malwa. The major indigenously ruled states of Malwa had sensed the reluctance of the company to tamper with the arrangements worked out in 1818. These states had their own contradictions with the British but did not push the contradictions to breaking point. The powerful Scindia state retained a great deal of real power vis-à-vis the company. It was also aware that as long as it did not threaten to completely undo 1818, it could rely on limited support from the colonial army to deal with some difficult situations. This allowed the Scindia state to continue undisturbed its long-term policy of keeping in check the ambitions of local elites, petty chiefs, zamindars and village intermediaries. It had 'ever been the [Gwalior] Durbar's fixed policy to depress to the level of mere zemeendars, by gradually denuding them of all save zemeendary rights, the numerous unguaranteed petty chiefs who enjoy any higher rights; and the reduction of these chiefs and their warlike clans used to be a great work of Scindia's army'.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Wilkinson to Wellesley, 24 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 68/18 November 1831.

¹²² Wilkinson to Robinson, 18 January 1832, FD Misc., IL, 193.

¹²³ Borthwick to Robinson, 15 February 1832, NAI, FD Misc., IL, 193.

¹²⁴ 'Report on Gwalior Affairs', S.C. Macpherson, Political Agent, Gwalior, to R. Hamilton, Agent to the Governor-General for Central India, 13 December 1856, NAI, FD, CIA, Gwalior Residency, file no. 267, pp. 75-76.

Colonial intervention was a new factor which placed the zamindars and *patels* at a distinct disadvantage. They desperately tried to recover lost ground with their small private armies. A number of 'gangs' of banditti had mushroomed in Malwa during the 1820s. In 1826, attention was drawn to two leaders of 'gangs' operating in the region, Dhun Singh and Dawu (?) Chund.¹³⁵ About the same time, Ajit Singh, a Sondhia leader, was active in parts of Sondhwara with 400–500 followers.¹³⁶ Ajit had been 'a disturber of the peace in northern parts of Malwa' for nearly a decade, and in 1821 had been imprisoned for a year or two by the Kota authorities.¹³⁷ He resumed his operations after being released and, in 1826, had written to the *amildar* of Rampura threatening 'to lay waste the country if his unconditional terms are not granted to him'.¹³⁸ At this point, the company decided to requisition troops from Nimach to check Ajit Singh. Incidentally, the not easily subdued Bhils were never far from such a scene. Lt. A. Lloyd was attacked by a party of Bhils in a rather spontaneous manner during the course of the campaign against Ajit Singh.¹³⁹

In another incident, the result of a dispute which reached its climax in 1821 and was subsequently revived at the time of Lallaji's uprising, the *chaudhari* of Sironj triggered a minor revolt in the process of attempting to win back some of his former rights. Sironj, at the eastern extremity of north Malwa, had been a Holkar territory. Yashwant Rao Holkar in turn gave it in jagir to his ally Amir Khan. After the third Anglo-Maratha war, Sironj became a part of Amir Khan's newly created principality of Tonk.¹⁴⁰ Amir Khan had drastically reduced the rights of the *chaudhari* which, in monetary terms, had amounted to Rs 20,000 annually. When an appeal was made to Malcolm, he declined to intervene in the matter. The *chaudhari*, Bhoj Raj, then dispatched an agent of his to various parts of Malwa to raise troops. This agent was able to win over a few disgruntled revenue farmers and intermediaries including Azim Bohra, formerly *ijaradar* of Sindia's Pavagarh mahals (district Panch Mahals, Gujarat), Kundoo Punt Nana and Niamat Khan Risaladar. The speed with which Bhoj Raj could levy 'a force of about 500 footmen and 60 suwars' is a comment on the state of affairs in north Malwa during the 1820s.¹⁴¹ A surprise offer of support for Bhoj Raj came from 'a person of European descent who is said to be the son

¹³⁵ George Rigby to Capt. Spears, 6 June 1826, NAI, FD Misc., IL, 191.

¹³⁶ E.M. Gordon, Bangur and Kanthal Political Agent's Office, Nimach, to Col. Lumley, commanding the Mewar Field Force, 6 June 1826, NAI, FD Misc., IL, 191.

¹³⁷ Wellesley to Swinton, 29 July 1826, *ibid*

¹³⁸ Gordon to Lumley, 6 June 1826, *ibid*.

¹³⁹ Lt. A. Lloyd, 48th Native Infantry, to Capt. W. Pickersgill, 16 June 1826, *ibid*.

¹⁴⁰ Malcolm, *Memoir*, Vol. II, p. 514; Hamilton, *Gazetteer*, Vol. II, p. 523; *Gwalior Gazetteer*, pp. 123–24; V.V. Thakur (ed.), *Holkarshahucha Itihasa*, Vol. I, Indore, 1944, p. 401.

¹⁴¹ Wilkinson to Wellesley, 8 November 1831, IL, 192/d.

of a Colonel Songster, formerly in the service of the Ranah of Gohud, but who has assumed the name of Tod and, on this occasion, described himself as the brother of the Political Agent at Oodepoor [James Tod].¹⁴² The company sent in its troops to prevent the affair from taking a serious turn and had brokered an agreement between Amir Khan and Bhoj Raj by which the chaudhari was assured of an annual income of a paltry Rs 600. He never reconciled to this depressed status and, contemporary with Lallaji's revolt, was making fresh attempts to assert himself.¹⁴³

We have already referred to Pratap Singh, who, when he presented himself in the darbar of Lallaji, 'explained to the Raja the straits to which he had been reduced'.¹⁴⁴ Deposing at his trial, Pratap Singh referred to Lallaji's instructions to Sondhia rebels 'that they were not to plunder, or oppress the Ryots in any way', upon which Puddum and Newul remonstrated saying ' "we have been robbed of our hereditary places how are we to subsist" '.¹⁴⁵ Kalyan Singh, another notable Lallaji loyalist might have had a similar grudge. Kalyan Singh was the son of Bhopal Singh, zamindar of Sundarsi. The zamindars of Sundarsi enjoyed 'large Huks [*haqs*, rights] in that Pergunna' which had steadily been encroached upon due to the peculiar administrative arrangements of the place.¹⁴⁶ Of the 30 villages belonging to the Sundarsi revenue unit, 12 were held by Sindia, 11 by Holkar and 6 by the Dhar Pawars. The town of Sundarsi was under the joint management of Sindia, Holkar and Pawar. There were besides the claims of the zamindar dispersed through these villages.¹⁴⁷ Even at the best of times, negotiating terms with the officials of the three Maratha chiefs, whose equations in relation to each other were being constantly redefined at the turn of the century, was no easy task for the zamindar. To this was added the presence of the company which preferred dues to be defined in fixed and absolute terms, reducing the scope for renegotiation. The plight of the Sundarsi zamindar illustrates the kind of grievances which found an outlet in Lallaji's movement.

Correspondence on the closing phase of the company's administration in eastern Shujalpur, coinciding with the 1831 rebellion, allows us to view the implications of closing the option of renegotiation of intermediaries' terms. When eastern Shujalpur came under direct British administrative control,

¹⁴² Henley to David Ochterlony, Agent, Rajputana-Malwa, 8 June 1821, *ibid.* Col. Sangster, whose son had now assumed the name Tod, had left the Rana of Gohad to join Sindia's elite corps raised by de Boigne. De Boigne had appointed him the superintendent of his arsenal. Cf. Herbert Compton, *A Particular Account of the European Military Adventurers of Hindustan From 1784 to 1803*, London, 1892, p. 31.

¹⁴³ Cf. Wilkinson to Wellesley, 8 November 1831, IL, 192/fi.

¹⁴⁴ Report of Ratanji, IL, 192/fi.

¹⁴⁵ Deposition of Pratap Singh, IL, 192/fi.

¹⁴⁶ Wilkinson to Wellesley, 24 September 1831, NAI, FDP, 68/18 November 1831.

¹⁴⁷ Capt. J.D. Cunningham, Political Agent, Bhopal, to R.N. Hamilton, Resident, Indore, 16 November 1848, NAI, FD, CIA, file no. 135.

colonial officials had argued that with the restoration of peace there would be an increase in production, and, hence, that a corresponding increase in land revenue was justified. Wilkinson, in his review of the settlement made by the first agent for eastern Malwa, Major Henley, remarked that he 'let the Pergunnah on a 5 years lease, raising the rent from about 70,000 Rupees by an annual increase to about 1,50,000 Rupees. And I see from his early correspondence that he expected it would, in the course of a few more years, yield 3 lakhs. The truth in such cases is admitted with the greatest tardiness. He lived to see [Henley died in 1823] but not to remedy the ruinous effects of these unfounded expectations'.¹⁴⁸ Village *patels* unable to meet the enhanced obligations had been put to great hardship. The cattle and property of defaulting *patels* had been put up for auction and sold 'and many of the defaulters were thrown for a season into the Sehore jail'.¹⁴⁹ Some remissions had been granted by Henley's immediate successor but these did not suffice to alleviate the suffering of the *patels* or other sections of the peasantry. Wilkinson discovered that a large number of *patels* had refused new terms offered to them and 'after a full and patient enquiry it appears that these unfortunate men had ample grounds of complaint: they could never have been so tyrant ridden by any of the less powerful neighbouring Native Governments without an explosion'.¹⁵⁰

Lallaji was firm about ensuring that any contradictions between sections of the peasantry and the intermediaries did not alienate the peasants from his cause. He strictly ordered the Sondhwara rebels to desist from committing any robbery or theft, threatening 'them with death if they plunder', but promising 'such as behave well a continuance of service'.¹⁵¹ Several months after the uprising had been suppressed, Wilkinson expressed his admiration for the fact that Lallaji 'would urge no oppression [against peasants] to justify his resistance to the established authorities'.¹⁵²

VII

Lallaji was not an armchair leader. He valiantly led from the front. One wonders whether he too was living under an illusion of divine dispensation. He might just have believed in the myth which he had himself given shape to. What is more important is that he realised that he had to live up to what he had been preaching. He is a heroic and, at the same time, a tragic figure. Pratap Singh, who was with Lallaji till almost the end, and fled when it became clear that there was little point in putting up further

¹⁴⁸ Wilkinson, Shujalpur Report.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ Letter to Wilkinson, n.d., NAI, FDP, 68/18 November 1831; Deposition of Pratap Singh, IL, 192/li; Report of Ratanji, *ibid.*

¹⁵² Wilkinson to Martin, 3 May 1832, NAI, FDP, CIA, file no. 34.

resistance, later recalled the raja's sombre address just before the shelling by McMahon began: "if the cannon balls reach us, then infer that I am not Aleejah Bahadoor[;] if I miraculously withdraw the balls from the guns and you hear only a blank report, then know that I am a true prophet." He then mounted his horse, and went to meet the British force."¹²⁹

More work needs to be done on local traditions to retrieve any traces of the memory of Lallaji that might have survived at the popular level. It is not difficult to comprehend how he sank into oblivion. The remoteness of the area in which the uprising occurred offers a partial explanation. Perhaps, the abruptness with which the uprising ended was another reason. Yet, contemporary British officials in Malwa were aware that had Lallaji triumphed on 1 October, the Dussehra of 1831 might have turned out very differently. In the course of a communication to Prinsep, Secretary to the Supreme Government, the acting resident at Indore was still not willing to belittle the significance of Lallaji, several months after the uprising had been suppressed:

. . . it may not here be amiss to remark that the least reverse happening to Capt McMahon's party . . . would have immediately swelled the Ranks of the Impostor beyond Calculation and set all Malwa in a Flame. That no such reverse did happen must be ascribed solely to the very fortunate occurrence of the fall of the Impostor on the first onset for the disparity of Force on Capt McMahon's part, the poor Materials of which it was composed and on the other Hand, the religious enthusiasm of his opponents, all lead to the conclusion that he must inevitably have been defeated had the Impostor survived. It would be hazarding rather too much to trust to the same good fortune a second time.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Deposition of Pratap Singh, IL, 192/II.

¹³⁰ Robinson to H.T. Prinsep, Secretary, Government of India, 19 February 1832, NAI, FD Misc., IL, 193.

Drawing a line: K. Venkatappa and his publics

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On 1 June 1916, K. Venkatappa returned to Mysore after seven years at the Government School of Art, Calcutta, where he had been among Abanindranath Tagore's privileged band of admirers and eager pupils.¹ Venkatappa left Mysore in 1909 for Calcutta with a scholarship from the Maharaja of Mysore, who had long been impressed by the phenomenal progress shown by this young painter.² At Calcutta, he enjoyed the tutelage of Abanindranath and earned a modest reputation as a member of the increasingly acclaimed 'Bengal School' of art which had pioneered a new 'nationalist' aesthetic.³ Could Venkatappa's return, then, be seen as something of a retreat from the privileges and risks of the emerging art world of Bengal to the relatively safer spheres of princely patronage and select audiences at the Mysore Palace? Not quite. The complexity of Venkatappa's negotiations—of the Palace culture that he had briefly left, of the emerging modern art world of critics, buyers, exhibitors and promoters, and of the Kannada national consciousness that was in the making—defies definition as 'reluctant modernity' or even as an anti- or non-modern subjectivity. For 24 years, i.e., until 1940, when he was rudely dislodged from his privileged position, Venkatappa built a career that combined assiduous devotion and loyalty to the Maharaja, at once his patron and his public at the Palace, with a cautious cultivation of a new, though by no means anonymous or bourgeois, art public, while simultaneously striving to distinguish himself from the milieu of other Palace artists, a milieu in which he

¹ K. Venkatappa Diary (hereafter Diary); K. Venkatappa Private Papers (hereafter KVPP), 2 June 1916, Karnataka State Archives (KSA).

² P. Raghavendra Rao, Private Secretary to the Maharaja of Mysore, to Raghavalu Naidu Electrical Engineer, Palace Division, 12 June 1905, KVPP, KSA.

³ Tapati Guha Thakurta, *The Making of a New 'Indian' Art: Artists Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal c. 1850–1920*, Cambridge 1992.

had been born. Both in his choice of genres and subjects after his return to Mysore, and in his relationship to the field of agents who constituted the new world of artistic production, Venkatappa carefully deployed his educational capital while simultaneously staging a break, denying too easy identification with the nationalist aesthetic as it was forged by Abanindranath and his pupils. Far from being a retailer of the new nationalist aesthetic, then, as was repeatedly claimed by art critics and historians alike,⁴ and rather than going forth 'like an apostle' 'to transmit the light of the Master',⁵ as did most of Abanindranath's other pupils, Venkatappa staked out a lonely path for himself, celebrating his estrangement from the emerging world of modern art.

This article charts the coordinates of Venkatappa's art world, and his specific relationship to them: they include the Royal Patron, the art critic, the art collector, the artistic reproduction and the student. The active insistence with which Venkatappa declared his reluctance to embrace the imperatives of the evolving field of artistic production was itself, I would argue, a form of participation in it, and as such may be located within that sphere of artistic autonomy that Pierre Bourdieu has characterised as 'anti-economic economy'.⁶ To the extent that Venkatappa spurned the institutions and practices of the emerging modern art market, and renounced the profits of recognition in the short run, it was only in the hope of reaping longer term symbolic profits. Among the many lessons that Venkatappa had learned while at Calcutta, and more specifically from his admission to the charmed circle at Jorasanko, the Tagore household, was the extraordinary importance of a 'specific capital' denied to those whose destinies were dictated by caste or hereditary callings. It was, perhaps, as a way of compensating for his inheritance that Venkatappa carefully defined a distinct ethico-moral universe that valorised abstinence, of the sexual and the material kind, and developed a mode of working that was as critical as the product itself. The artist's complex negotiations of the reconstituted field of artistic production in the twentieth century and his extraordinary self-image are therefore as crucial as his artistic output in any account that hopes to make sense of his consecrated status as one of the earliest bearers of the modern Kannada aesthetic.⁷ If anything, Venkatappa's career

⁴ G. Venkatachallam, *Contemporary Indian Painters*, Bombay, 1947, pp. 21, 65; Jaya Appasamy says he represented 'an unsophisticated and indigenous aspect of the Bengal School', in 'He Created a New Indian Style', in *K. Venkatappa: Savi Nenapu*, Bangalore, 1987, p. 71.

⁵ P. Ramachandra Rao, *Modern Indian Painting*, Madras, 1953, p. 12.

⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, New York, 1993, p. 54.

⁷ This article does not discuss, describe or assess any of the works of art at length, focusing instead on the conditions of artistic production. Briefly, Venkatappa's work, after his return to Mysore, consisted of some figurative works (watercolours and tempera on paper), largely on mythological themes, a series of miniature landscapes of Ooty and Kodakanal, a series of bas reliefs in plaster of paris, on mythological themes and a few portraits on ivory of important personages.

distinctly disrupts the narratives of how the twin demands of 'nationalism' and 'modernity' were negotiated by his contemporaries and as such serves as a crucial site for 'reperiodising the modern' in ways that relate art forms to social formations.⁸ Charting the coordinates of Venkatappa's art world helps us to reassess his struggles during a moment of transition from the world of the royal patron, whose powers were strictly limited but capricious, to the altogether new risks of an art market, a transition that Venkatappa managed by addressing an anonymous body of 'art lovers' fortuitously given a content by the ideologues of the incipient Kannada nation.

Making an Artist of an Artisan

To many of his contemporary chroniclers, Venkatappa's personal dispositions—his memorable eccentricities, his excessive litigiousness and his obsessive austerity—were the necessary marks of artistic genius.⁹ Yet, this was the moment when the world of modern art and its bourgeois public was being constituted, so that art critics, galleries, exhibitions and art journals alike were as critical to the legitimation of an artist as the work of art itself. We cannot, therefore, make sense of Venkatappa's 'uniqueness' without a consideration of both his position within the emerging social structure and his personal dispositions.

Venkatappa's staged indifference to the material world was not altogether unique. After all, the Bengali artists shared Venkatappa's calculated 'interest in disinterestedness' to an extent,¹⁰ in keeping with the emerging nationalist aesthetic's critical interrogation of the more mercenary and imitative trends within Indian art at the time, although Abanindranath's scornful reference to the 'evil spirit [that] smells of trader's greed' who 'sells himself at a fixed price and sometimes at a high value', all in the service of 'wealthy people' was somewhat disingenuous.¹¹ Yet Venkatappa's relation to artistic production was distinct, since Abanindranath's scorn was enabled not because the Bengal school kept itself sternly aloof from the lures of the market but because many, though not all, of its artists were

⁸ Geeta Kapur, 'When was Modernism in Indian Art', *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, Nov. 27–28 (1995), pp. 105–6.

⁹ Venkatesh Chalam, *Indian Painters*; S. K. Ramachandra Rao, *K. Venkatappa: The Man and His Art*, Bangalore, 1988; K. V. Subrahmanyam, *Venkatappa: Samakaleena Punaravalokana*, Bangalore, 1980. Even critics who are more willing and able to demystify this artist usually resort to doing so through an evaluation of his art work alone. Ravikumar, Kasi, 'Odedha Kannadi', *Sanchaya* Vol. 8(1), 1996, p. 42.

¹⁰ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, p. 40.

¹¹ Abanindranath Tagore, 'The Three Forms of Art', *Modern Review*, Volume 1(6), 1907, p. 393. See A. K. Coomaraswamy for a similar indictment of the artist who longed to be 'hung' or 'shown' in a museum, 'for things are made normally for certain purposes and certain places to which they are appropriate and not simply for exhibition because whatever is custom-made, i.e., made by an artist for a consumer is controlled by certain requirements and kept in order (emphasis in original). *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*, p. 7.

already endowed with sufficient economic and social capital to risk failure. To the extent that the cultural milieu of the Bengal school was coterminous with that of the Bengali bhadralok, an emergent Bengali middle class, it was one with which Venkatappa, by virtue of his caste, class and, let us not minimise this, his regional or provincial origins, was singularly unequipped to fully integrate.

Venkatappa was born in 1886 to a Chitragara family, traditional workers in gold leaf whose ancestors had long served under the Vijayanagar kings. In the early nineteenth century, Venkatappa's forefathers arrived in Srirangapatna from Chitradurga to seek refuge in the court of Krishnaraja Wodeyar III¹² and participated in the brief revival of the Mysore style of painting in the early nineteenth century.¹³ Of Venkatappa's father Durgada Krishnappa, himself an employee of the Mysore Palace, we know very little except that he belonged to a traditional caste of painters. Indeed, most of the artists employed in the palace—K. Kesavaiah, S. Shankarappa, Y. Nagaraju, Basavaiah, M. Rama Narasaiah—came from similar traditional artisanal backgrounds.¹⁴ The 'hollow crown' restored to the Mysore Maharaja by the British, especially after the interregnum of direct rule from 1831 to 1881, set serious limits to the nature of royal patronage of the arts, particularly the performing arts.¹⁵ Even so, caste continued to be considered the ideal preserver of a 'traditional artistic culture' so that later writers even suggested that 'traditional artists alone deserved to be encouraged' in the propagation of artistic ideals.¹⁶

Both Venkatappa and his father were surely witness to the arrival of Raja Ravi Varma and his brother at the Mysore Palace in 1904, and Venkatappa's only oil portrait of a woman probably dates from that period.¹⁷ Ravi Varma was commissioned to paint a series of nine paintings for the Durbar Hall of the newly constructed Palace, and for a generous sum of Rs 25,000, executed these works between 1904–06.¹⁸ Ravi Varma's

¹² V. Sitaramaiah, *K. Venkatappa*, p. 1 (Lalit Kala Academy, 1980); Ramachandra Rao, *K. Venkatappa*, p. 13.

¹³ Pushpa Sundar, *Patrons and Philistines: Arts and the State in British India*, Delhi, 1995, p. 113.

¹⁴ Memo File No. 33, Chitrasala Department, Mysore Palace Archives.

¹⁵ I have elsewhere discussed the manner in which the Mysore bureaucracy undermined and finally put an end to the services of devadasis in Muzrai temples and safe women in the Palace of the Maharaja. See Janaki Nair, 'The Devadasi, Dharma and the State', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 31(50), December 1994.

¹⁶ V. Aiyaswami Aiyer, 'Indian Arts and Crafts', *Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society*, Vol. 3(1), 1916, p. 58. Indeed, E. B. Havell expressed dismay over the dilution of caste as a marker of tradition when he wrote that 'students not belonging to the weaving caste' used the Serampore Central Weaving College as a passport to work in Swadeshi factories. E. B. Havell, *Artistic and Industrial Revival in India*, Delhi, reprint, 1986, p. 136.

¹⁷ Today at Shashwati museum, NMKRV College, Bangalore.

¹⁸ Correspondence between Ravi Varma and Mysore Palace, *Selections from the Records of the Mysore Palace*, Government of Karnataka, 1993, pp. 231–46; Sl. no. B. 190, 1904, Chitrasala Department, Mysore Palace Archives.

formidable reputation, and his own noble origins, no doubt, went a long way in ensuring that this painter was treated with far more privilege than any of the Mysore Palace painters of the time.¹⁹

Venkatappa gained precious exit from the cloistered world of the Palace painter to the more privileged but relatively alienating world of the Calcutta Art School. The Calcutta school offered quite different instruction from what Venkatappa had received at the Industrial Institute at Mysore, and by 1909, the entire range of elements so crucial to a modern art establishment—critics, publishers, exhibitors and middle class patrons—were harmoniously at work in promoting the work of Abanindranath and his pupils.²⁰ The critic 'Agasthya' was not far off the mark when he wrote that 'much of the power and vitality of the Tagore school is a gift from the opposition camp';²¹ the severe attacks on the Bengal school that were launched in the Assembly or the press were a sign of its growing influence, rather than its marginal status.

There was little by way of preparation for this new world in the palace culture of Mysore, or even at the industrial institute that Venkatappa attended, for traditional painters, though frequently encouraged to upgrade their skills, were strictly subordinated to the production regime at the Palace. Of the three major art schools that had been established by this time, Madras alone actively encouraged students from hereditarily artisan castes to seek training in European academic norms. Venkatappa had passed all the examinations offered by the school for external candidates; another Mysore artist, K. Kesavaiah, had attended the Madras school on a scholarship from the Palace before returning as supernumerary painter in 1902.²² In contrast, both the Bombay and the Calcutta art schools were decidedly elitist by the 1890s; in Calcutta this elitism was most marked, says Partha Mitter, with 'the majority of boys belonging to the bhadralok castes', even if, like Surendranath Ganguly, they came from desperately poor backgrounds.²³ Exemplifying the hierarchy between the traditional artist and gentleman painter were the salaries paid to Lala Iswari Prasad (of Lucknow) and Abanindranath Tagore respectively at the Calcutta

¹⁹ So that Ravi Varma and his brother could ask for, and be obliged with, music from the finest at the Mysore Palace School of Music. Sl. no. B 190, 1904, Chitrassala Department, Mysore Palace Archives. Even his son, Rama Varma was able to turn his father's reputation to his advantage when he received Rs 1,000 as payment for the painting of 'Harabchandra' in 1914. Palace Memo, 8 2.194, in *Selections from the Records of the Mysore Palace*, p. 246.

²⁰ Guha Thakurta, *The Making of a New Indian Art*, pp. 277–84; see, also, the Indian Society for Oriental Art, Special Issue on Abanindranath Tagore, Calcutta, 1916.

²¹ 'Exhibition at the Government School of Art', *Rupam*, Vol. 3(11), 1922, p. 76.

²² K. Kesavaiah to Maharaja of Mysore, 22 July 1903, in *Selections from the Records of the Mysore Palace*, p. 247.

²³ Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850–1922: Occidental Orientations*, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 55, 318. Sumit Kumar Chatterjee similarly noted that neither the Calcutta School nor Santiniketan drew students belonging to the hereditary artisan castes or guilds. 'The Revival of Indian Art and the Lucknow School of Arts', *Modern Review*, Vol. 41(4), 1927, p. 404.

art school: Rs 75 and Rs 300.²⁴ The caste heritage had its uses in Calcutta, since it was the traditional artists Venkatappa and Iswari Prasad who were set to work to produce indigenous pigments.²⁵

The Calcutta art school did throw up opportunities that traditional artists may not have had access to: Venkatappa was among the five artists chosen to illustrate the much circulated text of Sister Nivedita and Ananda Coomaraswamy *The Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists*;²⁶ with Nandalal Bose, he provided the illustrations to Abanindranath's pioneering article on 'Indian Iconography'²⁷; his works were regularly included at the annual exhibitions of the Indian Society of Oriental Art, Calcutta, which also frequently arranged sales.²⁸ The inclusion of his works at the India Society of London in 1910 earned him handsome praise from the art critic William Rothenstein, words that have ever since been cited as enduring evidence of Venkatappa's early genius.²⁹

The most relentless propagation of the Bengal school was done in the pages of *Modern Review* from its inception in 1907;³⁰ yet one searches in vain for reproductions of the Mysore artist's work, even at a time when he was unquestionably close to Abanindranath. At least one later critic deplored this systematic exclusion. Writing on the 'tremendous push to the cause of Indian art' by the Bengal school, N. Vyasa Ram complained:

... most people know about the Bengal art only through the pictures appearing from time to time in the *Modern Review*. Unfortunately, however, for reasons best known to themselves, those responsible for the selection of pictures for publication in the *Modern Review* do not seem to use enough discretion in the matter. It has to be even admitted that personal considerations in these matters are likely to exercise greater influence in the matter of selection than merit.³¹

²⁴ Guha Thakurta, *The Making of a New 'Indian' Art*, p. 270.

²⁵ Mitter, 'Art and Nationalism in Colonial India', p. 313.

²⁶ Sister Nivedita and Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists*, London, 1920.

²⁷ *Modern Review*, Vol. XV(3), 1914.

²⁸ Diary, 13 February 1914; 8 March 1920; 21 June 1920, KVPP, KSA. It is not quite clear whether Venkatappa was a member of the team that accompanied Lady Herringham to the Ajanta caves in 1910-11, although, see Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India*, p. 305. Contrast Guha Thakurta, *The Making of a New 'Indian' Art*, p. 278.

²⁹ JDW, 'The India Society', *Modern Review*, Vol. 8(2), August 1910, p. 161. See also Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Art and Swadeshi*, Madras, 1912, p. 132-33, for an appreciation of Venkatappa's early work.

³⁰ James Cousins claimed that his early knowledge of the Bengal school was confined to reproduction in the *Modern Review*, though that did not restrain him from writing in praise of its efforts. James Cousins and Margaret Cousins, *We Two Together*, Madras, 1950, p. 260.

³¹ N. Vyasa Ram, 'The New Spirit in Indian Art', *Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society*, Vol. 17(4), 1927, p. 298.

Nothing seems to have come of S.V. Ramaswamy Mudaliar's suggestion to O.C. Gangoly, writing on living Indian artists in 1923, to include Venkatappa as the 'only one in south India'.²² As for Venkatappa's own discontents about the bewildering social milieu of which he was a part, we know very little except that he was appalled, while searching for alternative accommodation as a guest of Gaganendranath Tagore in Darjeeling in 1914, that 'flesh, fish and vegetables are cooked and served by the same Brahmans in the same kitchen'.²³

At any rate, Venkatappa had a fierce sense of loyalty towards his patron, the Maharaja of Mysore, which he cited while turning down an attractive offer from Percy Brown, of a Government post as 'Art Adviser'.²⁴ He returned to Mysore in 1916 when his scholarship had ceased, although, in a move that was distinctly at odds with what the Bengal school had so consciously rejected, Venkatappa now sought the Mysore Palace's support for a visit to England to learn bronze casting'.²⁵ Venkatappa's visit to Europe was not to be, since Government support was delayed due to war,²⁶ and his interest in acquiring a European training soon faded as he was drawn into the world of music at the Palace school headed by Veena Seshanna, from whom Venkatappa received personal instruction in the veena.²⁷ In many ways, the period at the Palace Music school served as a useful interim arrangement by which Venkatappa avoided immediate absorption as Palace artist, while staking a claim to royal patronage on somewhat different terms.

Redefining the Palace as Patron

As a scholarship student returning to the palace of his patron, Venkatappa could hope for none of the privileges of a Ravi Varma. Yet, he could, and

²² Diary, 27 July 1923, KVPP, KSA.

²³ Diary, 15 May 1914, KVPP, KSA.

²⁴ Diary, 31 May 1916, KVPP, KSA.

²⁵ Venkatappa to Inspector General of Education in Mysore, 13 December 1916; Percy Brown to Private Secretary, Maharaja of Mysore, 17 February 1916, KVPP, KSA.

²⁶ Diary, 8 July 1916. This was later narrativised as the Mysore Government's reluctance to risk 'a great loss to the art world' by sending Venkatappa to a war-torn Europe. *Prabuddha Karnataka*, Vol. 10(1), 1928, p. 6. His colleagues from the Calcutta school, Asit Haldar and Promode Kumar Chatterjee, both went to Europe in the 1920s, and Haldar came back, as Abanindranath wrote to Havell, 'perfectly cured of foreign ideas'. Abanindranath Tagore to E.B. Havell, 5 September 1925, as cited in Ramachandra Rao, *K. Venkatappa*, p. 104.

²⁷ Diary, 24 January 1918, 30 January 1918, KVPP, KSA. Venkatappa was first assigned to study under Seshanna's junior, Subrahmanyam, with whom he had many conflicts, and after a while, with Voena Subbanna who was next only to Seshanna. By 1918, he was receiving instruction from Seshanna as well, sometimes at his residence, a relationship that continued until about 1925. Diary, 4 March 1918, KVPP, KSA. See also Margaret E. Cousins, *The Music of the Orient and Occident: Essays Towards Mutual Understanding*, Madras, 1938, p. 150.

did, use the newly gained cultural capital to his advantage, marking himself off from the Palace artists in more ways than one. Venkatappa refused to take up a Government job until the war was over, claiming that his 'education was not quite complete'³⁸ and firmly turned down the suggestion that he return to the Calcutta school even with a scholarship saying that he had learnt all that it could offer.³⁹ Unwilling to follow the footsteps of his father, Venkatappa attempted to turn his metropolitan experiences as well as his newly acquired asceticism to his advantage. Yet, his need for a working relationship with the Palace establishment set obvious limits to radical redefinition of princely patronage, as his encounters with the Private Secretary to the Maharaja, Mirza Ismail soon revealed.

To Mirza, the Mysore Palace had made an expensive investment in Venkatappa and the artist's immersion in music rendered useless the fine arts training that had been 'acquired at an enormous expense and trouble'.⁴⁰ Mirza set Venkatappa to work on a set of three landscapes, for which the artist was to provide written explanations 'so that spectators (*sic*) may easily understand',⁴¹ also assigned to Venkatappa was the design of a seal for the Mysore University.⁴² Mirza saw little reason to distinguish Venkatappa from other Palace artists who were frequently asked to paint portraits of various personages,⁴³ and asked Venkatappa to paint some portraits of the Maharaja in 1918.⁴⁴

Venkatappa avoided identification as another Palace artist well before he got the prestigious commission to decorate the walls of the Amba Vilas Durbar Hall. In doing so, he carved out a career quite distinct from that of the other Palace artists. Like the other Palace artists, Venkatappa too broke with the tradition of his forebears; the Mysore style painting was abandoned and saw a brief revival only in the work of Y. Subrahmanya Raju. At the same time, Venkatappa's Calcutta training had taught him to reject the large-scale oil paintings in the new academic realist oeuvre of Ravi Varma, which was enthusiastically adapted by the other Palace painters. At Calcutta, Venkatappa's work conformed to the evolving Bengal style, although his use of brilliant, flat areas of pure colour were reminiscent of the miniature tradition and his somewhat stiff, archaic figures were distinct from the dreamy vapory creations favoured by the other Bengal school artists. Back in Mysore, he struck out in different directions that drew as

³⁸ Diary, 16 August 1916, KVPP, KSA.

³⁹ Diary, 31 March 1917, KVPP, KSA.

⁴⁰ Diary, 14 February 1918; also 26 June 1918, KVPP, KSA.

⁴¹ Diary, 4 June 1916, KVPP, KSA.

⁴² Diary, 8 July 1916, KVPP, KSA.

⁴³ Palace artist Kesavalah was asked to paint a portrait of Dewan Purnaiah for the Victoria Memorial. File No. 30, 1899-1913-1927, Jagan Mohan Palace and Chitrasala, 6-8-1905, Mysore Palace Archives.

⁴⁴ Diary, 14 February 1918, KVPP, KSA.

much on his training in academic styles, reviving the dated technique of painting miniature portraits on ivory, developing a distinct style of landscape paintings, and going beyond prevailing Palace art conventions in proposing the medium of plaster of Paris for a series of bas reliefs at Amba Vilas.

Though he was not above accepting a commission to decorate the Palace walls, he distanced himself from the arduous and poorly appreciated labours of other Palace artists. K. Kesavaiah, for instance, only slightly senior to Venkatappa, had been sent by the Mysore Palace in 1897 to train at the Madras School of Arts for three years.⁶ He was appointed to the post of Palace artist for Rs 10 a month⁷ though he was soon able to combine Palace work with teaching at the Chamaraja Technical Institute, Mysore.⁸

The job of Palace artist was unenviable, quite distinct from the leisurely contemplative life of a gentleman artist so evocatively depicted in Nandalal Bose's drawing of the group at Jorasanko.⁹ Apart from his heavy teaching schedule, Kesavaiah was expected to produce several paintings for the Palace on a variety of subjects, for which he was separately compensated, though usually only with arbitrary sums which covered the costs of his materials.¹⁰ His assignments ranged from restoring old paintings, painting the Mysore coats of arms on carriages, and refurbishing chinks to making enlargements of photographs and painting landscapes to order. Nor were Palace artists automatically entitled to Palace honours; even after long years of service, Kesavaiah fought in vain to have his name added to the Durbar Honours list of the Mysore Palace, or at least a permanent well-paid post.¹¹ As late as 1943, Kesavaiah earned no more than Rs 35 per month, marginally more than his fellow Palace artists who earned sums between Rs 20 and Rs 35.¹² Gifts or presents from the Maharaja himself were rarer, though artists were urged to await princely 'rewards' rather than charge for their time and labour.¹³

The Palace artists were frequently ordered to paint portraits of various royal personages from photographs for distribution to institutions all over the state, the pace of such reproductions quickening when there were

⁶ Petition of K. Kesavaiah, 6 June 1925, *Selections from the Records of the Mysore Palace*, p. 257.

⁷ Letter dated 22 July 1903, *Selections from the Records of the Mysore Palace*, p. 247.

⁸ Letter dated 6 June 1925, *Selections from the Records of the Mysore Palace*, p. 257.

⁹ See Guha Thakurta, 'The Making of a New "National" Art', p. 276.

¹⁰ D/O No. 163/1, List, 30 July 1917, *Selections from the Records of the Mysore Palace*, p. 251.

¹¹ Kesavaiah to Darbar Bahadri, 11 October 1928, *Selections from the Records of the Mysore Palace*, p. 259.

¹² S. Shankar Raju to Huzur Secretary, 24 November 1943, Chitrasala Department, Mysore Palace Archives.

¹³ B. Ramakrishna to Thamboo Chetty, 20 October 1916; File No. 8, Sl. no. 4, Box 17, Chitrasala Department, Mysore Palace Archives.

administrative changes, or when the Royal household was altered.⁵³ Work on a series of large-scale oil paintings for the Kalyana Mantapa depicting the Dussehra and Birthday processions was begun in the 1920s, and continued well into the 1940s.⁵⁴ There was little by way of artistic freedom to relieve the sheer hard labour of the Palace artist, who was frequently reminded of his lowly status in the Palace hierarchy, as when Palace artist Abdul Azeez was asked to varnish the paintings of Ravi Varma in 1907. When both he and Kesavaiah were assigned to paint a series of pictures of Gods and Goddesses, they were merely expected to follow the advice of assorted Palace officials including the Dharmadhikari.⁵⁵

Venkatappa decided that the life of a Palace artist was an unacceptable destiny, and did everything to avert this fate. In order to prise himself away from too close identification with the Palace artists, it was critical that the labours of artistic *production* be recast, even mystified, as artistic *creation*. There was a self-conscious attempt, therefore, throughout his life to proclaim the position of a distracted, even mad genius, indifferent to the mundane world of praise and profit. Not surprisingly, he refused the costs of his materials, while graciously accepting a present of Rs 50 from the Maharaja for his landscapes.⁵⁶ To the creative artist, the prospect of a job in the Government, as arranged by the Inspector General of Education in 1918, was an unhelpful distraction.⁵⁷ Throughout the period before his commission to decorate the Amba Vilas Durbar Hall, he resisted all attempts to draw him onto the payroll of the Palace: it was unthinkable to even consider completing the panels of the Dussehra procession begun by Abdul Azeez for which he was tempted with offers of '30 to 35 thousand rupees'!⁵⁸

Crucial to his self-definition was the manner in which the 'artist' was distinguished from the 'artisan',⁵⁹ since only the former was culturally (and therefore materially) valued: the contrast between a Kesavaiah and a Ravi Varma was too stark to ignore. The category of artisan was one that Venkatappa struggled to get away from; no wonder, he reacted so strongly to G. Venkatachalam's description of him as 'a skilled craftsman with a

⁵³ Beginning in 1940, several dozen portraits of the new Maharaja Jayachamarajendra Wodeyar, were produced for distribution to the schools, colleges, bar associations, etc., at the rate of about 66 per year. Palace Administration Reports, 1940-43

⁵⁴ Palace Administration Reports, 1934-43.

⁵⁵ Ramakrishna Rao to Thumboo Chetty, 10 June 1916 and 5 July 1916, File No. 30, Vol. 3, Jagan Mohan Palace and Chitrasala, Mysore Palace Archives.

⁵⁶ Diary, 11 August 1916.

⁵⁷ Diary, 3 February 1918, KVPP, KSA.

⁵⁸ Diary, 2 January 1924, KVPP, KSA.

⁵⁹ On 9 April 1924, he went to a public library to consult the New International Dictionary for 'the exact difference between artisan and artist'. Diary, 9 April 1924, KVPP, KSA.

supreme command over his technique'.⁴⁰ Furthermore, Venkatappa was painfully aware of the limited liberties of a Palace artist: 'I am not', he wrote to Tiger Varadachari in 1935, 'a Palace artist but an independent man'.⁴¹ One way of asserting the difference was to cultivate a stern asceticism which he continually announced as a way of equally distancing himself from the Palace-controlled artist and producers for the new bourgeois art market.

Fashioning a Self-image

By his avowed, and insistent, distanciation from several kinds of material attachment, the artist claimed the status of a *Yugapurusha*, a man of the age, rather than a mere member of a new art movement. In a way, Venkatappa's acceptance of celibacy as an ideal, his strict code of self-reliance and his principled austerity were the logical, if somewhat extreme, outcome of his translation of the mystical, spiritualised aesthetics propagated by the Bengal school into a principle that governed the more intimate spheres of everyday life. Escape from the stifling confines of the Palace culture had exposed Venkatappa not only to a bewildering world of new art practices, but a world that was unmistakably bourgeois. The fashioning of a new ethical code could well have served as an anchor in that severely alienating environment. He was gently mocked for his desire to lead a pure life while at Calcutta; would 'Appa' return from his visit to the Himalayas, the legendary abode of the Sanyasi, Abanindranath wondered in 1913?⁴² He did return, bringing with him new and enduring principles for living that contemplation of the mountains had yielded.

Venkatappa has left behind a densely hatched self-portrait that helps to reconstruct not only the new subjectivities he was sculpting, but also the field of forces as it was being constituted in his time. It is a sign of his emerging sense of self that he maintained a diary, largely in English, from as early as 1913, with few breaks, until 1958. It may be that when he inscribed the words 'Self Help is the best help' on 6 May 1913, that he formalised what was to become a remarkable if obsessive austerity in his private life, taking the vow of *Aparigraha*, a renunciation of gifts or services from others.⁴³ The adoption of the vow of *Brahmacharya* similarly was a

⁴⁰ The word 'craftsman' was heavily scored out in Venkatappa's copy of G. Venkatachalam's book *Contemporary Indian Painters*, p. 39. Curiously, Venkatappa seems to have either missed or ignored P.M. Ramachandra Rao's even more damning indictment that he 'was a skulful draughtsman and a colorist of the highest order'. P.M. Ramachandra Rao, *Modern Indian Painting*, Madras, 1953.

⁴¹ Venkatappa to Tiger Varadachari, 15 November 1935, KVPP, KSA.

⁴² Ramachandra Rao, *K Venkatappa*, p. 30.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 31; Ravikumar Kasi, 'Odedha Kannadi', p. 34; M.S. Nanjunda Rao, 'Varnamaya Baduku', *Savi Nenapu*, p. 38.

sign of his yearning for the mystical aura of one who conserved his psychic and sexual energies for artistic production. His insistence on *Brahmacharya* as a condition for the pursuit of a career in fine arts made him turn away at least one married student, M.V. Sitaramaiah.⁶⁴ Whether he wilfully modelled himself as an artist 'of the type Sukracharya describes in his Sukraniti'⁶⁵ is somewhat less certain, but unmistakable was the sense of awe that he inspired even among more discerning critics such as P.R. Ramachandra Rao.⁶⁶ His spiritualised persona and his strict code of living have necessarily become, as Ravikumar Kasi has pointed out, inseparable from Venkatappa the artist.⁶⁷

Had Venkatappa confined himself to the world of the Palace, he could well have maintained the 'purity of his life',⁶⁸ an uncompromising but relatively anonymous existence. That the artist is known to us at all today is because of his relation with his publics—whether critic, buyer, student, publisher or exhibitor—a relation that was admittedly unorthodox, but far more complex than the mythologies have tended to suggest. If Rabindranath Tagore, who visited Mysore in 1922, expressed surprise that Venkatappa had not yet become a sanyasi, it was with good reason,⁶⁹ for the artist did not entirely reject the emerging world of modern art, nor did he neglect the more material aspects of life, as he himself indignantly pointed out to James Cousins in 1928: 'I was not rich but never lived the life of penury as you have baselessly stated in the Madras catalogue'.⁷⁰ If he had not become as rich as Ravi Varma, he suggested, it was because he preferred austerity but by no means was this a self-image of the starving artist in the proverbial garret. Venkatappa was conscious of the limited and receding importance of the Palace as a source of support for new artistic production, as much as he was aware of the perils of ignoring the emerging bourgeois art world. He steered himself through this period of transition by forging a very specific relation to the many people and institutions who legitimised and even consecrated the artist in the modern period, thereby making it possible to appeal to more than one constituency and cautiously expanding his publics beyond the sphere of the Palace without sacrificing the limited securities of that domain.

⁶⁴ Sitaramaiah, 'Kalaatapasvi', *Savi Nema*, p. 14.

⁶⁵ G. Venkatachalam, *Contemporary Indian Painters*, p. 60.

⁶⁶ P.R. Ramachandra Rao, *Modern Indian Painting*, p. 12.

⁶⁷ Kasi, 'Odeedha Kannadi', p. 34.

⁶⁸ Venkatachalam, *Contemporary Indian Artists*, p. 41.

⁶⁹ Diary, 28 September 1922, KVPP, KSA.

⁷⁰ Venkatappa to Cousins, 4 June 1928, KVPP, KSA.

The Making of an Artist's Public

The Critic

The work of art is inescapably a part of a field constituted by a set of agents—critics, collectors, publishers, students, and academies. In India, too, the world of the art critic was in the making even as the modern artist was being made, deciphering and thereby legitimating the work of art, while actively denouncing others. Ananda Coomaraswamy, who described critics as those who made up for what the artist lacked ('few artists are themselves able to write well about their own art') also called the critic the 'servant of artists'.⁷¹ Abanindranath Tagore alone, it was elsewhere claimed, had the rare ability to combine the roles of artist and critic.⁷² There was early recognition in *Modern Review* that the defeat of 'Ravi Varmaism' was only enabled by 'intelligent connoisseurs who have learnt the art of judicious appreciation'.⁷³ Ravi Varma's raw appeal could be countered only by disabusing the ignorant person of the 'childish notion' that a 'work of art, if it is a really good one, is bound to appeal to him however deficient he may be in his knowledge of Art . . .'.⁷⁴ At the same time, the critic had to be distinguished from the charlatan, for too many 'disappointed drawing masters, photographers, poster designers, jute brokers, members of the ICS and many England-returned gentlemen of erudition' crowded the scene,⁷⁵ and in the absence of the proper authority 'derived either from training or personal study' 'any hack could do a disservice to art'.⁷⁶ The naive ideology of the untutored person, who disparaged the Bengal school artists for 'painting fingers bigger than hands and nails bigger than fingers and eyes half shut just like those of confirmed opium eaters',⁷⁷ could be countered only by a Stella Kramrisch, an Ananda Coomaraswamy, a William Rothenstein. Indeed, the Bengal school artists appear to have leaned more heavily on the interpreter than artists such as Ravi Varma did.⁷⁸

The value of the critic in producing both an educated public and a decipherable code was further enhanced by his ability to secure patrons for

⁷¹ Ananda Coomaraswamy, 'About Pictures', *Modern Review*, Vol. 8(5), 1910, p. 523.

⁷² An anonymous article suggested that he be given a Chair of Fine Arts in the Calcutta University, *Rupam*, Vol. 2(8), 1921, p. 34.

⁷³ Arun Sen, 'The Rise and Decadence of Art in India', *Modern Review*, Vol. 11(6), 1912, p. 602.

⁷⁴ P. Ramanand, 'The Fine Arts in India', *Modern Review*, Vol. 21(1), 1917, p. 97.

⁷⁵ AC 'Indian Art and Art Critics', *Modern Review*, Vol. 39(1), 1926, p. 132.

⁷⁶ 'Art and Art Critics in India', *Modern Review*, Vol. 51(3), 1932.

⁷⁷ The words were Surendranath Mallik's, spoken during a debate in the Bengal Legislative Assembly. 'Indian Art', *Modern Review*, Vol. 32(3), 1922, p. 402.

⁷⁸ See Tapati Guha Thakurta, 'Westernisation and Tradition in South Indian Painting: The Case of Raja Ravi Varma, 1848-1906', *Studies in History*, Vol. 2(2), n.s., 1986, p. 191.

the struggling artist, especially at a time when royal patronage was precarious or entirely unreliable.⁷⁹ Venkatappa realised that stepping out of the face-to-face culture of the Mysore Palace brought its own share of risks that called for reliance on the critic. There were others who shared a similar background as his, like Kundanlal Mistri of Baroda⁸⁰ or Y. Nagaraju of Mysore,⁸¹ who, after testing the waters of the modern art world, even visiting Europe, returned to the comforting security of the Palace. Venkatappa, though denied his trip to the west, grasped the opportunities offered by the new world with both hands while keeping a firm foot in the Palace establishment. He had received heady praise from William Rothenstein, who said in 1910 that he found the relatively unknown artist so promising that he 'would place Mr Venkatappa at the head of that [revivalist, i.e., Bengal] school, and was even inclined to go further and place him at the head of any living school.'⁸² This was cherished for decades by Venkatappa's contemporaries and biographers, and was considered more authoritative than the Bengali critic who found Venkatappa 'lacking in heart',⁸³ and was taken as an enduring sign of his 'international reputation'.⁸⁴

Venkatappa's life and work after his return to Mysore was in many ways transformed by contact with the likes of James Cousins and G. Venkatachalam. More a promoter than a critic, Cousins came to occupy an important position not only in the Palace establishments of Travancore and Mysore, but also among collectors and cultural nationalists of southern India. Husband of the nationalist and Women's India Association founder Margaret Cousins, James Cousins arrived in India in 1915 as a journalist and joined the world of Annie Besant at Adyar.⁸⁵ The Adyar group was actively forging alternative spiritualised nationalist aesthetics and ideals of beauty on other fronts, importantly through the development of a sanitised Bharatanatyam dance form vested in Brahman performers, as distinct from the more erotic *sadīr*, performed by the devadāsīs. Any inadequacy of training in art criticism was more than amply made up in Cousins' enthusiastic appreciation of the Bengal school in the pages of *New India*, despite the fact that his early knowledge of this work was confined to reproductions in the *Modern Review*.⁸⁶ In 1916, he was invited by John Woodruff of the Indian Society of Oriental Art to visit the Eighth Annual Exhibition at Calcutta, and Cousins' suggestion that the whole exhibition be transported

⁷⁹ See, for instance, the report on Mr Solomon's speech at Bombay, calling for the careful cultivation of bourgeois patrons. *Rupam*, Vol. 2(8), 1921, p. 36.

⁸⁰ Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India*, p. 64.

⁸¹ Report no. 62/20/21, 948 from officer-in-charge Chitrasala, Chitrasala Department, Mysore Palace Archives.

⁸² JDW 'The India Society', *Modern Review*, Vol. 8(2), p. 161.

⁸³ Arun Sen, 'The Exhibition of Oriental Art', *Modern Review*, Vol. 13(4), 1913, p. 438.

⁸⁴ Venkatappa to Huzar Secretary, 6 December 1935, KVPP, KSA.

⁸⁵ *Modern Review*, Vol. 59(1), 1936, p. 110.

⁸⁶ Cousins and Cousins, *We Two Together*, pp. 260–61.

to Madras in his care 'for a dignified and intelligent display' was accepted. The exhibition 'made a stir in the cultural life of Madras [and] got wide newspaper publicity' and though 'not a picture was sold' Cousins' career as an authority on art was launched.⁸⁷ His somewhat vapid writing, replete with general platitudes about the Indian Renaissance and the Bengal school, thrived in the Adyar environment, where reiterations of the need for a new spiritualised aesthetic and flattering, if unspecific, remarks on the works of artists themselves were more than adequate.⁸⁸

Venkatappa met Cousins in September 1923 through S.V. Ramaswamy Mudaliar, a businessman and collector who had commissioned an ivory miniature portrait from the artist.⁸⁹ Cousins talked about Venkatappa on his lecture circuit,⁹⁰ invited him to do a portrait of Chand Bibi in water colour⁹¹ and had won the confidence of the Mysore Palace establishment enough to get Mirza to set up 'the first permanent compendious gallery of Modern Indian painting in South India' at the Jagan Mohan Palace in 1924, an extension of the Museum started in 1915.⁹²

It was Cousins who initiated the Yuvaraja of Mysore into appreciation of the work of Venkatappa and persuaded him to buy two of Venkatappa's paintings—'Mahasivarathri' and 'Mad After Veena' (Veeneya Huchchu)—for the Mysore Gallery in 1924.⁹³ Of 'Mahasivarathri', Cousins later wrote in the gallery catalogue: 'This picture was admired for its own merits and bought by His Highness before he knew anything of the artist who painted it.'⁹⁴ Cousins' importance as the one who legitimated Venkatappa's work was growing⁹⁵ and along with G. Venkatachalam, publicised Venkatappa's work in lecture tours both in India and elsewhere,⁹⁶ recommended his work to exhibitors,⁹⁷ and arranged the sales of pictures,⁹⁸ including those that had

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

⁸⁸ See James H. Cousins, *The Renaissance in India*, Madras, 1918; *idem*, *Aesthetical Necessity in Life*, Allahabad, 1944; *idem*, *The Social Value of Arts and Crafts*, Bangalore, 1925. Also Cousins' description of Venkatappa's work in Catalogue of the Jagan Mohan Chitrasala, Mysore Palace Archives.

⁸⁹ Diary, 16 September 1923, KVPP, KSA.

⁹⁰ Diary, 28 September 1923, KVPP, KSA.

⁹¹ Cousins to Venkatappa, 21 September 1923, KVPP, KSA.

⁹² Cousins and Cousins, *We Two Together*, p. 415; Jagan Mohan Chitrasala, Mysore, Gallery of India Paintings with an Historical Introduction and explanatory notes (no date), p. 76. Also, Cousins to Thumboo Chetty, 3 July 1924, File No. 30, Vol. V, Mysore Palace Archives.

⁹³ Cousins to Venkatappa, 3 September 1924, KVPP, KSA.

⁹⁴ 'Jagan Mohan Chitrasala Mysore, Gallery of Paintings with an Historical Introduction and Explanatory Notes' (no date), p. 75.

⁹⁵ Mudaliar to Venkatappa, 7 July 1923; 1 July 1923; 27 July 1923; 10 September 1923, KVPP, KSA.

⁹⁶ Cousins to Venkatappa, 31 August 1927, KVPP, KSA.

⁹⁷ S. Fyze Rahamin, Society for Encouragement of Indian Art, to Venkatappa, 29 July 1927, KVPP, KSA.

⁹⁸ Diary, 6 August 1924, records that Rs 630 was received as payment from Cousins for the two paintings bought by the Yuvaraja, after the 10 per cent commission. KVPP, KSA.

been returned unsold from elsewhere.⁹⁹ The autobiographical and rather literal representation of the anguished artist in 'Mad After Veena', for instance, torn between the two muses of art and music had been returned with Abanindranath's forthright comment that though the technique was good the subject was not appealing: 'You may be mad after vina or painting but that is not sufficient to put it into a picture Your picture must contain something which is of permanent interest for only then it can appeal to many.'¹⁰⁰ Cousins installed this work at the Jagan Mohan Chitrasala,¹⁰¹ and in its new location, came to be seen and appreciated, even revered by a range of Kannada intellectuals; Abanindranath had not quite accounted for provincial tastes.

There was something about the painting's depiction of the artist as a mad genius that appealed to a range of Kannada litterateurs, such as Shivarama Karanth, R.R. Diwakar, Kuvempu, V. Sitaramaiah, D.V. Gundappa and B.M. Srikantaiah.¹⁰² The composition, though somewhat dominated and even overwhelmed by the veena, was the closest that Venkatappa came to a self portrait. In it, the unshaven, gaunt artist is on his knees before the veena, turned away from his guru Abanindranath, whose sculptured head on a towering pedestal is shrouded, while the imprisoned muses of painting and drawing mutely yield their power to the goddess of music who alone commands the artist's attention.

Cousins had chosen this painting in keeping with his commitment to the new spiritualised aesthetic, for he sought to direct the work of Indian artists according to the tastes of his western audiences 'who preferred', he claimed, 'religious pictures, pictures of symbolic and imaginative kind, pictures giving intimate glimpses of human life in India' to 'natural scenery'.¹⁰³ Yet, asserting Venkatappa's status as a legitimate practitioner of the new Indian aesthetic was an important part of the critic's work, as was consistently done by Venkatachalam, Cousins and Ramaswamy Mudaliar in the 1920s:¹⁰⁴ 'How could I pretend to exhibit the art of India', Cousins once wrote to him, 'without at least one Venkatappa?'¹⁰⁵ So highly did Cousins

⁹⁹ Diary, 14 February 1923; 15 March 1923; 27 April 1923; 26 May 1923; KVPP, KSA.

¹⁰⁰ Tagore to Venkatappa, 24 March 1922, KVPP, KSA. Indeed, it is more than likely that the theme suggested itself to Venkatappa after he received Abanindranath's letter telling him that 'painting was his first wife' and music only 'his second'. Abanindranath to Venkatappa, 2 November (no year), KVPP, KSA.

¹⁰¹ Jagan Mohan Chitrasala, Mysore, Catalogue, p. 76.

¹⁰² See for instance, Shivarama Karanth, *Bharatiya Chitra Kala*, Puttur, 1930, p. 45.

¹⁰³ Cousins to Venkatappa, 25 November 1929, KVPP, KSA.

¹⁰⁴ Venkatachalam to Venkatappa, 7 June 1927, 1 July 1927, 8 July 1927; 2 August 1927; 14 February 1930, 19 July 1934; 27 August 1944; 22 August 1950, KVPP, KSA.

¹⁰⁵ Cousins to Venkatappa, 1 January 1928, KVPP, KSA. In turn, Cousins took credit for his 'artistic wisdom' in recommending Venkatappa to the Rani of Cooch Behar, especially after the ivory portrait of her husband was declared 'a beautiful piece of Indian painting fully worthy of the masters of the Moghul and Rajput schools'. Cousins to Venkatappa, 1 October 1925; Khusru Jung, Comptroller to Maharani of Cooch Behar, to Venkatappa, 18 and 28

rate his importance as a critic that he was deeply offended when the Madras Exhibition of 1928 awarded Venkatappa a gold medal for just one painting while he himself, who arranged the section, was given only 'a certificate of merit'!¹⁰⁶

The legitimising authority of the critic came to good use in the long run: Cousins' description of his meeting with William Rothenstein in London, who recalled that Venkatappa was the most promising Indian artist, was produced as evidence before the Magistrate's court in 1925, proof, no doubt, of Venkatappa's international reputation; other expressions of Cousins' praise also made their way into the courtroom in 1937.¹⁰⁷

Neither Cousins nor Venkatachalam was indispensable, and their relations with Venkatappa soured by the late 1920s. Venkatappa's enhanced self-image, due not just to the commission he secured to decorate Amba Vilas Durbar Hall in the Mysore Palace, but also to his growing reputation among the Kannada litterateurs, now permitted him to challenge Cousins the critic.¹⁰⁸ Cousins' indirect indictment of landscape art could not have endeared him to Venkatappa, who began doing landscapes in 1926, and with astonishing success, reversing the order of 'progress' that had been charted by Cousins, who described an early Ooty landscape as 'an example of western style painting in which the artist had attained high ability before turning to his own Indian art'.¹⁰⁹ Venkatappa objected to the description of 'Mad After Veena' in an exhibition catalogue, in which Cousins suggested that Venkatappa had turned to music out of his frustration at not being recognised as a painter: rather, the artist claimed, he shunned the 'mob' because he was 'quite well known to his Highness the Maharaja of Mysore my patron' long before Cousins had entered the scene.¹¹⁰

In 1938, there were further signs that Venkatappa no longer needed endorsement of the kind offered by Cousins: Cousins' entry in the revised Chitrasala Catalogue was wrong, Venkatappa said, because 'my technic (*sic*) is not a copied one or one in which both Moghul and Rajput schools are combined as you have erroneously mentioned, but a genuine one suited to my taste and genius'.¹¹¹ He now traced a genealogy that made no reference to his years at the Calcutta school. Secure in the knowledge that he had the patronage of the Mysore Maharaja, Venkatappa criticised

February 1925, KVPP, KSA. The Rani was immensely pleased with the portrait which was modelled on photographs, especially after 'slight alterations' to the nose 'greatly improved the picture'. Khursu Jung to Venkatappa, 16 July 1925, KVPP, KSA.

¹⁰⁶ Cousins to Venkatappa, 19 February 1928, KVPP, KSA.

¹⁰⁷ These are evident from the seals on the letters preserved by Venkatappa; the actual details of the two cases are not known.

¹⁰⁸ Venkatappa to Cousins, 4 June 1928, KVPP, KSA.

¹⁰⁹ Jagan Mohan Chitrasala Catalogue, p. 77.

¹¹⁰ Venkatappa to Cousins, 4 June 1928, KVPP, KSA.

¹¹¹ Venkatappa to Cousins, 3 August 1938, KVPP, KSA.

buyers such as the Rani of Cooch Behar to whom Cousins had introduced him, concluding that Cousins should get himself an education as an art critic rather than mislead people. Critics aside, Venkatappa's relationship to his patrons, whether royal or bourgeois, was always troubled, given the ease with which he believed that he had been wronged, and above all, poorly valued.

The Collector

Venkatappa's consistent refusal to sell his work after 1926, when he decided to start a painting school and studio in Bangalore, has overshadowed the artist's earlier anxieties about the question of a just price for his work. Far from being indifferent to the value of his work, Venkatappa emerges from his diaries and correspondence as one who was more than marginally concerned about the prices his work commanded, especially in the early part of his career; not even his frequent assertions that such concern was more about proper recognition of his artistic genius detract from his early reputation as one who struck a hard bargain.

In part, Venkatappa's indignation at receiving just Rs 400 from the Rani of Cooch Behar for his ivory portrait of her late husband¹¹² stemmed from the high expectations he had of royal patrons; even Venkatachalam had led him to believe that he would be paid several thousands.¹¹³ He knew of the Maharani's expensive and fruitless search for a suitable portrait artist, which made the 'petty sum' for his pleasing portrait even less acceptable. Cousins' assurance that a generous donation towards his studio/school would soon follow failed to persuade Venkatappa to part with the second portrait:¹¹⁴ instead, he demanded rather steep, therefore unacceptable, rates calculated against the number of landscapes that he could execute in the same time.¹¹⁵ Similarly, he returned the sum of Rs 150 given by S.V. Ramaswamy Madallar for his ivory portrait in 1924,¹¹⁶ and though there were eager and determined buyers for his Ooty landscapes in 1926, especially 'Elk Hill Walk' and 'Dawn' which were on display in Bangalore, Venkatappa refused to part with them for what he considered were 'very poor' rates.¹¹⁷

What does one make of an artist who preferred to keep many of his works unsold, and refused commissions that offered too little by way of compensation? What was that critical threshold that signified recognition,

¹¹² Venkatappa to Cousins, 7 October 1926, KVPP, KSA.

¹¹³ G. Venkatachalam to Venkatappa, 26 October 1925, KVPP, KSA.

¹¹⁴ Cousins to Venkatappa, 23 December 1925, KVPP, KSA.

¹¹⁵ He wanted Rs 3,000 for the portrait in ivory, Rs 1,500 for the bust on paper, and Rs 2,500 for a full length portrait.

¹¹⁶ Diary, 25 August 1924, KVPP, KSA.

¹¹⁷ Diary, 14 July 1926, KVPP, KSA.

so that, while responding to disappointing offers on grounds that they disrespected his artistic genius, he could still bargain for marginally higher prices? Finally, what may we make of a person who took several people to court for real and imagined wrongs and injustices, using the courtroom as a stage to defend, perhaps even build up, his reputation as an artist, rather than material gain? This was, after all, the same man who displayed such acute anxiety about making a go of his life as an independent artist that he repeatedly sought the help of astrologers in the early 1920s.¹¹⁸ All this changed rather dramatically after he was first approached to do work at the Mysore Palace.

In his dealings with a Bombay collector, Burjor N. Treasuryvalla, we may discern Venkatappa's negotiations of the contradictory promises of the art market, especially since Treasuryvalla was a mirror image of sorts, persistently arguing that his 'love of art' be considered as far more important than the modest amounts he was willing to pay for artworks. A partner in his father's stockbroking firm, Wallace and Company, Treasuryvalla was a zealous collector of modern Indian art, seeking out new artists and persuading more established ones to part with their work for little or no payment. Treasuryvalla was a collector in the classic nineteenth century mould, choosing to hoard his treasures, only reluctantly bringing them out of the closet for guests, and never permitting his possessions to leave his house for exhibitions.¹¹⁹ He began a long and regular correspondence with Venkatappa in May 1920, when he first expressed his keenness to 'enrich the small collection of work by Bengal school artists'.¹²⁰ After wooing Venkatappa most patiently for more than four years, Treasuryvalla acquired three of his paintings and commissioned several others that were not delivered. Describing Venkatappa's 'Mrugathrushna' as 'a veritable masterpiece', Treasuryvalla declared: 'There is hardly any other painter amongst the disciples of Tagore except Nandalal who could have produced a work of such extreme beauty'.¹²¹ But such lavish praise did not make up for what Venkatappa considered was meagre payment of Rs 100, although Treasuryvalla denied that he had thereby 'degraded art',¹²² insisting, instead, that the true enthusiast was worth far more than a rich patron.¹²³ Three years later, Treasuryvalla only paid a marginally higher amount of Rs 130 for Venkatappa's 'Buddha' picture, and that after much haggling.¹²⁴ All the while, Treasuryvalla used a steady flow of compliments to soften the artist,

¹¹⁸ Diary, 19 October 1923; 8 June 1924, KVPP, KSA.

¹¹⁹ Venkatachalam to Venkatappa, 29 January 1925; 16 August 1925, KVPP, KSA.

¹²⁰ Treasuryvalla to Venkatappa, 21 May 1920; Diary, 22 May 1920, KVPP, KSA.

¹²¹ Treasuryvalla to Venkatappa, 25 June 1921, KVPP, KSA.

¹²² Treasuryvalla to Venkatappa, 11 February 1922, KVPP, KSA.

¹²³ Treasuryvalla to Venkatappa, 2 February 1922, KVPP, KSA.

¹²⁴ Treasuryvalla to Venkatappa, 19 September 1921; 4 October 1921; 11 October 1921; 25 January 1922; 2 February 1922; 11 February 1922, KVPP, KSA.

urging Venkatappa 'not to be a Shylock' by slyly suggesting that other Bengal school artists were so impressed by his [Treasuryvalla's] devotion that they had donated their works.¹²⁵

While commissioning a series of paintings, Treasuryvalla took extraordinary liberties with the artist, specifying not only the sizes but also the themes, the kind and quality of the colours, demanding a 'generous use of gold' in themes of 'Hindu mythology'.¹²⁶ Urging Venkatappa to use a 'medium which would last longer and which would keep the colours unchanged for a long period',¹²⁷ Treasuryvalla requested a set of *raginis* featuring women with 'beautiful gold sarees with broad gold bands at the edges' executed, of course, in 'permanent colours'.¹²⁸ In fact, Treasuryvalla only rose in Venkatappa's estimate in 1923, when 'he seems to have understood the worth and the real value of my works'.¹²⁹ Yet, Venkatappa refused to honour his many requests, and instead, sent Treasuryvalla his unsold pictures.

It may be no coincidence that Venkatappa demanded, and received as much as Rs 800 from Treasuryvalla for the last painting that he sold to him in 1924 ('Sita and Mareecha'), shortly after he was approached by the Palace authorities to decorate the Amba Vilas Durbar Hall.¹³⁰ This spoke of a new-found confidence, of an artist unwilling to take mere praise in lieu of hard cash. It was also the moment when he recognised the importance of drawing the line between executing a commission and slavishly accommodating the desires of his patrons. Treasuryvalla's detailed demands were, after all, quite different from receiving suggestions before executing a commission, for had not Ravi Varma himself asked the Mysore Palace establishment whether the figure of Rama should 'be painted in the natural flesh tint or in the blue colour as depicted in the Puranas?'¹³¹ Treasuryvalla's demands were troubling since they indicated that Venkatappa had not sufficiently distanced himself from the Palace artist who worked at the bidding of his employer. His position as modern artist was vulnerable for here was a patron who brazenly dictated every aspect of the artistic production, denying the artist the role of 'creator' except in his display of draughtmanship and skilful use of colour. Venkatappa had also learned that it did not always pay to accommodate the desires of the buyer, having obliged the Rani

¹²⁵ Treasuryvalla to Venkatappa, 10 February 1922, KVPP, KSA.

¹²⁶ Treasuryvalla to Venkatappa, 20 July 1921, KVPP, KSA.

¹²⁷ Treasuryvalla to Venkatappa, 27 June 1921, KVPP, KSA.

¹²⁸ Treasuryvalla to Venkatappa, 26 December 1923, KVPP, KSA.

¹²⁹ Diary, 5, 10 October 1923, KVPP, KSA.

¹³⁰ Diary, 18 September 1924; 21 September 1924; 27 September 1924; 29 September 1924; 2 October 1924, KVPP, KSA.

¹³¹ Ravi Varma to P. Raghavendra Rao, 22 March 1905; in *Selections From the Records of the Mysore Palace*, p. 238.

of Cooch Behar by narrowing down her husband's nose to acceptable proportions, without reward.¹³² Nor was he willing to remove the figure of the woman from Buddha's picture for S.R. Ramaswamy Mudaliar, not even on historical grounds.¹³³

In what way could the artist declare his autonomy while still earning a 'fair' value for his work? Venkatappa was able to resolve this question by accepting the commission to decorate parts of the Mysore Palace, for which he was approached as early as 1924¹³⁴ while simultaneously beginning a series of landscapes at Ooty, which proved an instant success in an unexpected quarter, among a range of cultural nationalists.¹³⁵ His contact with Kannada litterateurs such as D.V. Gundappa and B.M. Srikantaiah must also have encouraged him in his resolve to set up a 'painting school and studio' at Bangalore, after which he obstinately refused to sell his paintings.¹³⁶

The commission from the Palace released him from the tedium of making a living without reducing him to the level of Palace artist. Venkatappa's segmented existence allowed him to devote a part of his time and effort to pleasing the royal patron, while zealously hoarding his landscapes for posterity. Even the choice of genres seems to reflect this new division of labour: the plaster of Paris bas reliefs, largely illustrating mythological themes belonged to the Palace milieu, were immovable and meant for the restricted pleasure of the patron. The small and pleasing landscapes in watercolour had broader appeal both in the use of colour and in the meticulous detailing, and were available for wider circulation and appreciation.

The series of low bas reliefs in plaster of Paris were proposed as a way of 'harmonising' with existing 'crude and gaudy' upper portions which were already in place,¹³⁷ and are a relief in an otherwise garish room. The subjects that Venkatappa first proposed for the walls of the Durbar Hall were somewhat eclectic, ranging from illustrations of mythological themes, such as Shakuntala's departure from Kanva's ashram and Draupadi *swayamvara*, to 'love scenes'. Nor did he miss an opportunity to declare his loyalty to the king by proposing as well

¹³² Khusru Jung to Venkatappa, 28 March 1925, 16 July 1925, KVPP, KSA; the mythology of Venkatappa has it that he finally refused to alter 'the drunkard's nose.' Venkatachalam, *The Artist with Strong Character*, *Savi Nenapu*, p. 57

¹³³ Mudaliar to Venkatappa, 1 August 1923; 10 September 1923, KVPP, KSA.

¹³⁴ Diary, 8 September 1924, KVPP, KSA.

¹³⁵ Diary, entries for May 1926, 11 April 1926, KVPP, KSA

¹³⁶ Diary, 14 July 1926, KVPP, KSA.

¹³⁷ Diary, 9 September 1924: 'Amba Vilas Durbar Hall, Mysore', text and drawings at Venkatappa Art Gallery, Bangalore

an episode from the Purana history of Yadava from which the Mysore Royal Family descends. For this subject I would suggest the scene of 'Srikrishna's Upadesha' of Bhagavad Gita of Arjuna.¹³⁸

Venkatappa's suggestions regarding the bas reliefs were readily accepted by the Maharaja, and Venkatappa, in turn, claimed that he was glad to accept whatever the royal patron offered. The contrast with the world of Treasuryvalla could not have been starker, the artist now released from the labours of pleasing multiple art dealers and buyers. So well-known was his independence of the bourgeois public after 1926, that Venkatachalam indignantly spurned Treasuryvalla's last bid to freely procure a tempera rendering of Sivarathri in exchange for lending his Venkatappas to a Bombay exhibition.¹³⁹

Legend has it that Venkatappa insisted that he would undertake the Palace assignment only on condition that 'the subject for the panels should be left to him; that there should be no time limit; that he must be permitted to visit the Palace in his own daily garb of a short coat, a turban, a dhoti and an umbrella tucked under his arm, [and]; that there should be no official interference of any sort from the Palace.'¹⁴⁰ Mythology apart, between 1926 and 1940 the privileges he enjoyed were certainly not those of a Palace artist. After he completed the first of the reliefs in late 1928, 'Departure of Shakuntala',¹⁴¹ duly approved and admired by the Maharaja himself,¹⁴² Venkatappa received a princely sum of Rs 5,000.¹⁴³ His work alone was singled out for mention as a 'masterpiece' in the Palace administration report on the artists' annual productions,¹⁴⁴ and by 1931, he was allowed the use of a set of rooms above the Palace dispensary as a separate studio. Not only was he relieved of the strenuous labours of reproducing portraits from photographs or painting the Mysore coat of arms, the generous compensation freed him from reliance on intermediaries who were more than likely to 'distort' his work.

The clearest expression of privilege was the extraordinarily long time Venkatappa took over each bas relief: the second bas relief of Siddhartha was completed only in 1934; a good five years after the first, while the third, the 'Dance of Siva', was completed in 1939. In those 14 years,

¹³⁸ Undated Memo, 'Subjects for paintings on the wall of Amba Vilas by Venkatappa', KVPP, KSA.

¹³⁹ Venkatachalam to Venkatappa, 9 August 1927, KVPP, KSA.

¹⁴⁰ Venkatachalam, *Contemporary Indian Painters*, p. 36; Ramachandra Rao, *K. Venkatappa*, p. 57.

¹⁴¹ Diary, 17 December 1928, KVPP, KSA.

¹⁴² Diary, 2 January 1929, KVPP, KSA.

¹⁴³ File No. 33, Sl. no. 11, Office order dated 30 January 1929, Chitrasala Department, Mysore Palace Archives, Mysore.

¹⁴⁴ Palace Administration Report, 1928-29, p. 20.

Venkatappa only briefly turned attention away from the bas reliefs when he did a series of landscapes at Kodaikanal in 1934.

Meanwhile, the studio had become a place of pilgrimage, especially for Kannada litterateurs such as D.V. Gundappa, Kuvempu, V. Sitaramaiah and R.R. Diwakar, who were treated to private showings of the artworks by lamplight, in select groups, and only by appointment. Venkatappa could not have been unmindful of the risks he took in relying on the patronage of just one man, even if he was royalty, so the cultivation of this new public could well have been his way of coming to terms with the dwindling importance of the Palace. Even so, the abrupt termination of his commission a few weeks after the death of Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV in August 1940 was a rude and unexpected shock.

What the new Maharaja might have found so objectionable is only a matter of speculation. By taking nearly 14 years to complete a handful of bas reliefs, Venkatappa compared poorly with the pace of either a Ravi Varma or the humbler Palace artist,¹⁴⁵ and the artistic aura that he so carefully built up did little to compensate.¹⁴⁶ Venkatappa's bitter exchange with James Cousins in 1938 must have cost him dearly, for Cousins was a cherished advisor to the Palace administration, rearranging the pictures at the Chitrasala, making new purchases and drafting the catalogue, as well as making periodic changes to it.¹⁴⁷ And Venkatappa seems to have sounded his own death-knell in his artless letter of condolence to Jayachamaraja Wodeyar, the new Maharaja:

It is no exaggeration if I say that his late Highness was a fountain of patronage to all sorts of aesthetics, and that evil days, I fear, seem to have fallen upon aesthetic subjects from the days of his death.¹⁴⁸

Jayachamaraja wasted no time in dispensing with the services of Venkatappa. On 23 September 1940, the artist received news that the present Maharaja did not want any more panels, and that he had to vacate the Palace dispensary after Dussehra.¹⁴⁹ The Palace remained cool towards Venkatappa's entreaties that he be allowed to complete his commitments to the late Maharaja, and on 25 September 1940, the only complete panel, the 'Dance of Siva', was removed to Amba Vilas;¹⁵⁰ Venkatappa moved residence to Bangalore, where he remained until his death.

¹⁴⁵ Palace Administration Reports from 1928–29 to 1944–45 give us an indication of the enormous output of the Palace artists.

¹⁴⁶ Venkatappa's communications with A.V. Subrahmanyaraj Urs are a case in point, 15 May 1931, 11 November 1933, KVPP, KSA.

¹⁴⁷ Palace Administration Reports, 1938–39, p. 18; 1941–42, p. 18; 1942–43, p. 17.

¹⁴⁸ Venkatappa to Maharaja, 6 August 1940, KVPP, KSA.

¹⁴⁹ Diary, 23 September 1940, KVPP, KSA.

¹⁵⁰ Diary, 25 September 1940, KVPP, KSA.

Venkatappa's silence about the exact nature of the contract with the Mysore Palace was a sign that dealings with the royal patron occurred on an entirely different register. Indications are that there was no formal contract, so the termination of the commission by the new Maharaja dissolved the distinction between the royal and the bourgeois public: the new Maharaja's action smacked of cold-blooded calculations entirely unworthy of a royal patron and aroused the litigant in Venkatappa, by now a victor of many court battles. In 1943, when it became clear that the Palace was unyielding on the question of fair compensation, Venkatappa instructed his lawyer to file a suit in the Magistrate's court against the Mysore Palace for breach of contract, and claimed compensation of Rs 40,000.¹⁵¹ The suit was dismissed as unmaintainable by the District Magistrate, a decision that was upheld by the High Court in 1946, on grounds that the Palace was not a legal entity and the sovereign was 'not liable to be sued in his own courts without his consent'.¹⁵²

The courtroom had long been the stage on which Venkatappa strove to establish his artistic genius. The case against the Maharaja was no exception, since Venkatappa hoped to recoup his honour rather than make good the loss of a patron. Losing the chance of a public hearing was therefore more of a blow than his failure to recover dues from the Palace, for the case was argued entirely on technical grounds, and few of the nationalist papers reported more than the legalistic details of the argument.¹⁵³ Despite growing resentment against native princes, the artist rallied no more than a few sarcastic comments aimed more at mocking the institution of the Maharaja than sympathising with the artist.¹⁵⁴ It did not help that he had for so long actively shunned 'publicity' and 'advertisement' by discouraging the reproduction of his works in the popular magazines and the press. Over the years, he had also gradually withdrawn from the exhibition circuit, stating his resolve to establish a studio.¹⁵⁵ But the circulation of the work of art, even in reproduction, went a long way in building an artist's public: Venkatappa's distrust of this was yet another way of drawing a line between himself and the likes of Ravi Varma, or even the Bengal school.

¹⁵¹ Diary, 20 September 1943, KVPP, KSA.

¹⁵² Mysore High Court Reports, Volume 51, *Venkatappa v. The Mysore Palace*, 28 October 1946, pp. 486–527. Venkatappa submitted a set of documents, probably as proof of his agreement with the Palace, but regrettably, these records are untraceable. More surprising is the fact that all papers relating to the case are missing from Venkatappa's private papers as well.

¹⁵³ *The Hindu*, 30 October 1946.

¹⁵⁴ *The Indian Express*, 1 November 1946, KVPP, KSA, commenting on the decision that the Mysore Palace is not a legal entity said 'some of the State Congress leaders would prefer a judgement declaring the occupant of the premises in question as a legal nullity'.

¹⁵⁵ Despite knowledge of his aversion to exhibitions, there were several requests. Bratin-drath Tagore to 'Appa Saheb', 16 November 1935; R.R. Diwakar to Venkatappa, 10 October 1927; Venkatachalam to Venkatappa, 21 July 1934, KVPP, KSA.

The Reproduction

If Ravi Varma's national popularity was enabled by the mass-produced oleographs that invaded every home, the work of the Bengal school was no less actively retailed by the exhibitions and excellent reproductions of the Indian Society of Oriental Art.¹⁵⁶ More important, as Abanindranath himself admitted, 'our pictures are in every household today because of Ramananda Babu . . . by his perseverance and financial investments in superior colour and half tone prints he had created a demand where none existed before . . .'.¹⁵⁷ Chatterjee's *Picture Albums*, though privately dismissed by Havell as 'Chatterjee's trash', placed in national and international circulation a range of high quality reproductions of the Bengal school. Reducing the 'tyranny of the Ravi Varma oleograph', as Cousins put it, was solely enabled by the *Modern Review*, redefining taste in such a way that even south India, where Ravi Varma had not yet relinquished his hold over a pious public, 'will not for long be content to exist on Bengal reproductions'.¹⁵⁸

Neither Cousins nor the Fine Arts associations in Bangalore to which Venkatachalam and art dealer Fred Harvey belonged, compared with institutions like the ISOA, although beginning in 1924, exhibitions were frequent, and Cousins and Venkatachalam toured the country with slides of various artists.¹⁵⁹ Though Venkatappa's distrust of reproduction bordered on paranoia, he was not entirely averse to high quality reproductions: in 1911–13, he did the series on the Ramayana for the *Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists*, and, in 1931, he sought Palace permission to photograph his bas reliefs for reproduction in international journals.¹⁶⁰ At other times, he sent gifts of photographs of his work to friends and well-wishers,¹⁶¹ and even offered R.R. Diwakar photographs in lieu of works for exhibition in Dharwar.¹⁶²

High quality journals such as *Modern Review* ignored Venkatappa, even though he regularly sent works to the exhibitions of the Indian Society of Oriental Art in the early 1920s. But if the 'national' art publisher cold-shouldered the artist, there were far more eager takers in Mysore and

¹⁵⁶ O.C. Gangoly, 'Indian Society of Oriental Art', in *Abanindranath Tagore*, Golden Jubilee Number, November 1961, p. 99.

¹⁵⁷ As cited in Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India*, p. 350; also Guha Thakurta, *The Making of a 'New' Indian Art*, esp. 274–84.

¹⁵⁸ Cousins, 'The Future of Indian Art', *Rupam*, Vol. 5(17), 1924, p. 46.

¹⁵⁹ Venkatachalam to Venkatappa, 9 August 1927; 2 August 1927; Cousins to Venkatappa, 25 November 1929.

¹⁶⁰ Venkatappa to A.V. Subrahmanyaraja Urs, 15 May 1931; reply to Venkatappa, 17 May 1931, KVPP, KSA.

¹⁶¹ As on 1 January 1926, four photos were sent to E.W. Edwards, Hardwicke College, Mysore, Diary, KVPP, KSA.

¹⁶² R.R. Diwakar to Venkatappa, 10 October 1927, KVPP, KSA.

other Kannada-speaking regions of the South. Especially after the mid 1920s, Venkatappa's works were increasingly sought by a range of struggling poets, writers, and journalists. Venkatappa declined a five-year contract from K. Bhaskara Sastry to illustrate his translations of several Sanskrit texts into Kannada, for which a monthly salary of Rs 60 and other facilities were guaranteed.¹⁶³ *Prabuddha Karnataka* published a long article about Venkatappa with reproductions of his works in 1926.¹⁶⁴ Two years later, it introduced readers to the now famous 'Mad After Veena' accompanied by a detailed biographical sketch.¹⁶⁵ By this time, both *Viswakarnataka* and *Tai Nadu* were carrying regular reports on the artist's plans for a school, extending the aura of the brilliant and talented artist.

Venkatappa was always anxious to assert the 'irreducibility of the pictorial work' and rescue it from being mere illustration or 'secondary to the printed work'.¹⁶⁶ So upset was he by the 'cold and horrible' reproduction of his work 'Mad After Veena' in Shivarama Karanth's book *Bharatiya Chitra Kala* that he refused to accept the complimentary copy.¹⁶⁷ Karanth had pleaded that his 'abilities were small', that none of his publications had ever paid their way and that 'even poverty of means should not hinder me from doing what little I can towards art'.¹⁶⁸ Venkatappa found Karanth's excuse unacceptable, pointing to the irreparable harm done by poor reproduction, especially when the 'linguistic account' was far superior to the 'pictorial' one, for such reproductions only helped some western critics to continue their work of maligning Indian work.¹⁶⁹

Venkatappa kept a stern eye open for any reproductions that appeared without his permission, demanding apologies (in third person) from those who had reproduced his work in journals and even threatening some with lawsuits.¹⁷⁰ *Rangabhumi*, the journal of the Amateur Dramatic Association of Bangalore which published his 'Mahasivarathri' was severely rebuked for 'grossly misrepresenting the work of the "world renowned" artist',¹⁷¹ for which editor B. Sreenivas duly apologised.¹⁷² Faced with the threat of litigation, it was safer to admit defeat, as A.R. Krishna Sastri did when he readily admitted he had seen Venkatappa's picture 'murdered',¹⁷³ and agreed that 'Nobody knows more than I do how defective were the reproductions in *Prabuddha Karnataka* but that was the best we could do in this

¹⁶³ Diary, 23 February 1918, KVPP, KSA.

¹⁶⁴ Diary, 14 January 1926, KVPP, KSA.

¹⁶⁵ *Prabuddha Karnataka*, Vol. 10(1), 1928, pp 5-12.

¹⁶⁶ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Revolution*, p 47.

¹⁶⁷ Diary, 21 August 1933.

¹⁶⁸ Shivarama Karanth to Venkatappa, 4 August 1930, KVPP, KSA.

¹⁶⁹ Venkatappa to Shivarama Karanth, 10 August 1933, KVPP, KSA.

¹⁷⁰ Letter protesting poor reproduction of 'Nocturne' (no date, no place), KVPP, KSA.

¹⁷¹ Draft Letter, no date, no place, KVPP, KSA.

¹⁷² B. Srinivas to Venkatappa, 8 October 1930, KVPP, KSA.

¹⁷³ A.R. Krishna Sastri to Venkatappa, 11 October 1930, KVPP, KSA.

country'.¹⁷⁴ Only after a long and tedious exchange of letters, blocks and proofs did Venkatappa agree to allow V. Sitaramaiah to use his works as illustrations in his book of poetry.¹⁷⁵ Even so, the artist asked for all the blocks to be returned to prevent their further use as book and newspaper illustrations.¹⁷⁶

May these exchanges be taken as a sign of an artist who only reluctantly engaged with the world of modern art production and reproduction, or were these signs of a highly developed modern artistic ego? 'That which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction', Walter Benjamin has noted, 'is the aura of the work of art',¹⁷⁷ and it was precisely this aura that was fiercely protected by Venkatappa. Coming to terms with an ever-expanding scale of art viewers, whether in galleries or exhibitions, or even in reproductions, meant taking risks which Venkatappa was clearly unprepared for. He saw no particular value in popularising his work in marked contrast to Nandalal's enthusiastic, even programmatic, embrace of the reproduction as a vehicle for the circulation of new artistic ideals.¹⁷⁸ No wonder Venkatappa made impossible demands of those who wished to publish his work, not all of which were related to the quality of the reproduction. Approached by the Assistant Editor of *The Hindu* in 1926 for a photograph of his landscape 'Elk Hill Walk' for publication in the illustrated Annual, Venkatappa declared that the 'cheap paper' was unworthy of his work. He evoked a sharp response from the Editor for demanding the 'security of any well-known gentleman' as a condition for sending his work, and for selfishly keeping the picture only for 'the edification of a select few rather than the many who need it'.¹⁷⁹ Venkatappa was convinced that *The Hindu* could prove its commitment to 'educating the ignorant mass artistically' only by distributing the newspaper free of charge!¹⁸⁰

Keeping a tight rein on reproductions was clearly a hopeless task, but Venkatappa's exasperation with inattentive reproduction came to a head when two photographs of the Palace bas reliefs appeared in *Udbodhan*, the Bengali monthly of the Sri Ramakrishna Mission. In its 1935 (Ashwin 1342) Puja Special Number, the journal carried reproductions of Venkatappa's 'Renunciation of Buddha' and 'Rama gifting the signet ring to Hanuman'.¹⁸¹ The Rama picture, which had inadvertently been reproduced

¹⁷⁴ A.R. Krishna Sastry to Venkatappa, 17 October 1930, KVPP, KSA.

¹⁷⁵ V. Sitaramaiah to Venkatappa, 29 September 1930; Venkatappa to Sitaramaiah, 9 October 1930, 31 October 1930, 6 November 1930, KVPP, KSA. See V. Sitaramaiah, *Guhagalu* (Karnataka Sahitya Prakatana Mandira, 1931), which contains illustrations by both Venkatappa and Nandalal Bose.

¹⁷⁶ Venkatappa to Sitaramaiah, 6 November 1930, KVPP, KSA.

¹⁷⁷ Walter Benjamin, *Illustrations*, translated by Harry Zohn, New York, 1985, p. 221

¹⁷⁸ Guha Thakurta, 'Visualising the Nation', *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, Nos 27–28, 1995, pp 31–35

¹⁷⁹ Assistant Editor, *The Hindu* to Venkatappa, 8 September 1926.

¹⁸⁰ Venkatappa to Assistant Editor, *The Hindu*, 10 September 1926.

¹⁸¹ *Udbodhan*, Ashwin 1342, Puja Special (1935), pp. 473, 497

in the reverse, angered Venkatappa enough to seek the help of the Mysore Palace to object, since the mistake damaged not only the artist and his 'international reputation' but 'the fair name of our progressive model state which is well known for its civilisation and Fine Arts'.¹⁴² Not just aesthetic principles were violated, he claimed, but religious sensibilities, for the reproduction showed Rama 'giving the ring with the left hand and wearing the sacred thread on the right'.¹⁴³ The explanatory note may well have compounded Venkatappa's indignation, since descriptions of the artist as 'able', 'competent' and 'a skilled draughtsmen' did not diminish the prime importance given to Venkatappa's master, Abanindranath.¹⁴⁴ Though the Palace refused to be drawn into this affair, the Mission was quick to rectify the mistake carrying a written apology in the 1342 Magh issue, and, after Venkatappa's approval, reprinted the blocks the right way up in its Jaistha issue.¹⁴⁵ This did not prevent Venkatappa an adept at court procedures¹⁴⁶ from filing a suit for libel and claiming damages of Rs 1.

It is more than likely that Venkatappa filed the suit in a fit of pique, for the photographs of the bas reliefs had been taken by one Swami Nikhila-nanda who promised to reproduce them in 'selected artistic periodicals in America'.¹⁴⁷ To discover them published in a Bengali religious journal instead must have been a blow to Venkatappa's aspirations, and the one rupee suit was clearly an attempt to publicly recoup his honour. As it happened, it was no more than a pyrrhic victory when the court found in his favour: one of the two witnesses who appeared on his behalf to testify on the maintainability of the suit of libel, Shahid Suhrawardy, frankly admitted that Venkatappa's work did not appeal to him.¹⁴⁸ Percy Brown, the second witness was more appreciative, but the judge, whom Venkatappa noted was hostile to his counsel¹⁴⁹ commented at length on the pettiness of

¹⁴² Venkatappa to Huzur secretary, 6 December 1935, KVPP, KSA.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*

¹⁴⁴ *Udbodhan*, 1342 (1935).

¹⁴⁵ *The Calcutta Weekly Notes*, Reports of Important Decisions of the Calcutta High Court and of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council on Appeal from India, Vol. XLI, Nov. to Dec. 1937-38, p. 1046.

¹⁴⁶ The first case he filed was in 1920 at the Mysore Magistrate's court against a person who stole coconuts from his trees, for which the convicted thieves were caned. Diary, 19 November 1920, KVPP, KSA. The judge, while appreciating his work as an artist, did his best to discourage the artist from litigious behaviour and hoped he would become a great man. But Venkatappa having drawn blood, developed a taste for courtroom battles. Although we do not know the details of all cases, he successfully fought at least three other legal battles before the *Udbodhan* case, and threatened several recalcitrant buyers and patrons with legal action. Diary, March-April 1924, 3 September 1932; January 1933. Even the publicised setback against the Mysore Palace did little to diminish his appetite for legal battles. Ramachandra Rao, *Venkatappa*, pp. 86-87.

¹⁴⁷ *The Statesman*, 7 April 1938, p. 13.

¹⁴⁸ *The Calcutta Weekly Notes*, p. 1047

¹⁴⁹ Diary, 16 April 1938, KVPP, KSA

the complaint, awarding the one rupee in damages but only half costs since too much court time had been wasted. 'It appears to me unfortunate', the judge declared, 'that a man in the Plaintiff's position with a considerable artistic reputation should have allowed his case to be pressed so strongly and in such detail on the quantum of damages, particularly in view of the very full apology which had been made . . .'¹⁹⁰

Yet it is a sign of how much Venkatappa depended on such verdicts as proof of his fame that he reported his victory to Abanindranath Tagore as a repeat of Whistler's famous one shilling suit against Ruskin.¹⁹¹ Venkatappa relished court battles so much that he thought nothing of the enormous costs he had incurred in fighting the *Udbodhana* case. Clearly, the costs of litigation, whether in money or time and effort, were more than fairly compensated by the verdicts, in defending or even establishing his image as a principled artist. Such qualities as unwavering commitment to ideals in personal life were so important to the work of artistic production that he stressed the virtues of asceticism as a fundamental quality for any aspiring artist, and consequently succeeded in turning away many potential students. His desire to serve as a role model and as a pedagogue was clearly at odds with his unwillingness to accept students and develop their skills and abilities.

The Artist as Pedagogue

It was part of Venkatappa's staging of himself as a committed artist that he referred to himself throughout his life as 'a student of fine art'. He had been an exemplary student, 'quiet and gentlemanly', and 'a credit to the state he represents'.¹⁹² Yet, his diaries and records reveal a remarkable indifference to reflection on art practices or even to dialogue with other artists.¹⁹³ Even when he consulted his guru Abanindranath in 1937 while working on the 'Dance of Siva' it was only to clarify the sastraic injunction about how many hands were permitted in representations of the God.¹⁹⁴

In striking contrast to Abanindranath's other pupils who fanned out across the country to head various institutions of art, Venkatappa studiously

¹⁹⁰ *The Calcutta Weekly Notes*, p. 1051.

¹⁹¹ Diary, 8 April 1938, KVPP, KSA.

¹⁹² Percy Brown to Private Secretary, Maharaja of Mysore, 1916, KVPP, KSA.

¹⁹³ In 1951, he told O.C. Gangoly that he did not believe in attending lectures on art. Diary, 11 September 1951, KVPP, KSA.

¹⁹⁴ Abanindranath's reply was simply to reassert what he had said in the article on Indian iconography: 'You must know that the sastras were made after the statues were made by artists'. Abanindranath to Venkatappa, 11 February 1937. The bas relief finally depicted Shiva with two hands.

avoided being attached to any institution, whether new or existing.¹⁹⁵ He refused to be tempted by the possibility of a job at the Andhra Jatheeya Kalasala at Machilipatnam in 1920,¹⁹⁶ a job later accepted by Promode Kumar Chatterjee, and turned down C.R. Reddy's tempting invitation in 1928 to join the Andhra University Faculty of Arts and Music and 'make a name that will live for centuries'.¹⁹⁷ His loyalty to the Maharaja and his gratitude for opportunities received tied him to the Mysore state, and especially the Palace. The only students who were lucky enough to receive instruction from him were Anand Mohan Sastry and Ram Mohan Sastry who were recommended by Srinivas Rao of the Machilipatnam school in 1926;¹⁹⁸ although Ram Mohan soon dropped out. Venkatappa was an exacting teacher, and so grudging in his appreciation of the students that when he received news that the two had been taken onto the staff of the Machilipatnam school, he described it as a 'great pity' as an 'increase of incompetent persons as teachers, lecturers and writers on Indian art throughout India': 'The neglect of so many centuries I think did not do so much harm to Indian art as the renewed patronage or the enthusiastic revival of the last two decades'.¹⁹⁹

With such a reputation, it need not surprise us that his resolve to start a free school of art in Bangalore remained unrealised. He asked several people, including Mahdi Hasan of Osmania University to send him worthy students,²⁰⁰ but made conditions too difficult for potential students; he refused M.V. Sitaramaiah because he was already married,²⁰¹ a group of others because they were 'older than 14 years',²⁰² and dismissed Narayan Sangam, a student of Nandalal's from Bombay presidency who was sent by Abanindranath, as a mere 'beggar'.²⁰³ He had no more than the minimum contact with the other artists associated with the Palace. Painter Y. Subrahmanya Raju recalled that when he gently informed Venkatappa of complaints that he had not shared his knowledge with others, the artist answered that he had climbed to the summit of the art world, a feat that was impossible to teach another person.²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁵ Nandalal Bose was at Santiniketan, A.K. Haldar at Lucknow, Samarendranath Gupta at Lahore, Sallendranath Dey at Jaipur, Sarada Ukil at Delhi, Promode Chatterjee at Machilipatnam, and D.P. Roychoudhry at Madras; although Ramachandra Rao claimed that Venkatappa 'taught at Mysore', this was not the case. Ramachandra Rao, *Modern Indian Painting*, p. 12.

¹⁹⁶ Diary, 16 and 17 April 1920, KVPP, KSA.

¹⁹⁷ Diary, 24 August 1928, KVPP, KSA.

¹⁹⁸ Srinivas Rao to Venkatappa, 19 March 1926; 1 June 1926; 23 September 1926, KVPP, KSA.

¹⁹⁹ Letter, no date, place (1931?), KVPP, KSA.

²⁰⁰ Diary, 27 January 1942, KVPP, KSA.

²⁰¹ Sitaramaiah, *Savi Nenapu*, p. 14.

²⁰² Diary, 6 July 1948, KVPP, KSA; also Balarama Kulkarni to Venkatappa, 20 December 1946, KVPP, KSA.

²⁰³ Abanindranath to Venkatappa, 31 May 1928, KVPP, KSA.

²⁰⁴ Subrahmanya Raju, *Savi Nenapu*, p. 20.

Venkatappa's intolerance as a teacher has long been seen as just another eccentricity; yet, Venkatappa's determination to start a school contradicted this active discouragement of individual students. There were ample indications that the principle of self-denial could no longer be made a condition, yet Venkatappa desired authority within a mode of power (the *guru-shishya parampara*) that was already in retreat, overwhelmed by the pressures and material rewards of the emerging art market. Marthanda Joshi confessed his difficulty in 'being detached from the world of economics' in a letter to Venkatappa: though he had hoped to spend his lifetime studying art with him, Joshi was forced to accept a job as artist in Calico Mills.²⁰⁵ Venkatappa's long-cherished desire that his works should, above all, serve the task of instruction could not be realised with any group of students. Yet, he steadfastly refused to part with his works in the belief that they would eventually be lodged in a location where they would instruct rather than serve merely as decoration or to cater to private pleasures. After 1941, his own studio served as a private gallery through which groups of critics, writers, scientists and nationalists were conducted by the artist himself. When the royal patron had all but vanished, and the bourgeois buyer was as yet unacceptable in Venkatappa's schema, what else could fulfil his aspirations except the agencies of the nation state?

Conclusion

On 5 October 1940, Venkatappa left Mysore for Bangalore where he had purchased some property for his studio and school in 1928.²⁰⁶ The move from Mysore represented a sharp shift away from the courtly culture of the Mysore Palace of which he had so long been a part, but was now clearly threatened with extinction. Abandoning the leisurely world of Mysore for the hard, shiny brilliance of the administrative capital was also a shift in loyalties, not so much from the royal patron to the bourgeois art market but to the new arbiters of state power and, indeed, taste. Was that a moment when the artist was confronted with his historic error of judgement in actively seeking the patronage of the Maharaja on his return from Calcutta in preference to a bourgeois public? Venkatappa was too clever by far to be destroyed by the Palace administration's betrayal of his trust, for had he not, as early as 1926, prepared for this break, simultaneously developing a mode of existence, a genre (notably his landscapes), and indeed a new, though doubtless small, public that was far from aristocratic?

Ironically the very court verdict that so forcefully asserted the unassailable power of the Maharaja succeeded in convincing Venkatappa that the world of royal patrons and palace artists had come to an end. Soon after his appeal against the palace for Rs 40,000 was dismissed in 1946, he received

²⁰⁵ Marthanda Joshi to Venkatappa, 13 January 1937, KVPP, KSA.

²⁰⁶ Diary, 14 April 1928, KVPP, KSA.

an offer of Rs 5,000 from the Maharaja, and the freedom to do as he wished with the remaining panels, but Venkatappa no longer wished to be beholden to the Mysore Palace refusing to compromise his 'principles' and dignity.²⁰⁷ There could be no turning back to the capricious princely culture of old Mysore, or indeed any other princely state; even V.V. Srinivasa Iyengar's offer to arrange for him to join the Travancore State was therefore completely unacceptable.²⁰⁸

The desire to bequeath his legacy to an 'imagined community' of art lovers had defined his approach to buyers, critics, students and publishers alike since 1926. Only much later was this 'imagined community' given a content by his growing band of admirers, when Venkatappa took his place among those forging the aesthetic of the new Kannada nation.²⁰⁹ After 1940, Venkatappa did no new work, except for completing the bas reliefs and one landscape in 1957 and otherwise reorienting his older work. Yet, it was in this period that he was consecrated as the bearer of modernity in Kannada art. It was a role for which Venkatappa had only unwittingly prepared, and his actions a few days after his High Court appeal was dismissed reveal a man who had finally come to terms with the new field of forces when the link with the Palace was decisively broken. On the night of 28 October 1946, Venkatappa read in *Tainadu* that his appeal had been dismissed. After flatly declining all Palace offers, on 20 November 1946, Venkatappa set about doing something he had resisted all his life: mounting all the certificates of merit and medals awarded to him since 1910. 'Though framing them and showing them to visitors was against my will and taste all these 36 years', he confessed in his diary, 'yet the inner urge to bring them to light was great, so I took them out of the trunk in which they were locked ever since they were received'.²¹⁰ Between 23 and 25 November, he displayed these as well as his works in chronological order for several officials and ex-officials of the Mysore state.²¹¹ It could not entirely have been a coincidence that Venkatappa was asked in November 1946, shortly after the case ended, to head the Karnataka Academy of Fine Arts as President, a post to which he recommended K. Kesavaiah instead.²¹² He had no need for such formal positions; by this time, after all, the Kannada nation had already laid claim to Venkatappa as a modern Indian artist.

²⁰⁷ Diary, 14 November 1946, KVPP, KSA.

²⁰⁸ Diary, May 1944, KVPP, KSA.

²⁰⁹ A.S. Raman, 'A Determined Perfectionist', *Savi Nenapu*, p. 64.

²¹⁰ Diary, 20 November 1946, KVPP, KSA.

²¹¹ Diary, 23–25 November 1946, KVPP, KSA.

²¹² Diary, 20 November 1946, KVPP, KSA.

Book Reviews

DANIEL BROWN, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, pp. x + 185, £30, \$49.95.

This is not a book about the rethinking of 'tradition' in a broad sense, but rather a study of modern debates about the role of the 'tradition of the Prophet', the sunna, in Muslim life in Pakistan (and pre-Partition India) and in Egypt. Brown argues persuasively that debates about the sunna have been central to Muslim intellectual efforts to come to terms with modernity. 'Modern Muslims are at odds over *how* to emulate the Prophet', he argues, 'but not over *whether* to do so' (p.138). Brown takes the reader brilliantly through these debates, focusing, in successive chapters, on 'the boundaries of revelation', 'the nature of Prophetic authority', and 'the authenticity of hadith', showing at once the new approaches that have shaped modern debates and the continuities that link contemporary debates to the earliest controversies among Muslim legists and hadith scholars. While he notes the radical implications of intellectual efforts to bypass hadith (such as those of Ghulam Ahmad Parwez in Pakistan and Muhammad Tawfiq Sidqi in Egypt), it is the continuity in the language and issues of debate that is the most powerful message conveyed by the book. As he observes in his conclusion: 'The parallels between medieval and modern discussions of sunna are striking' (p. 138).

Brown's strength lies in his ability to convey to us what mattered intellectually to the participants in these arguments (part of which, of course, was the sense of participating in an argument of timeless importance). But his book is far weaker when it comes to grounding these debates in their modern historical contexts. Brown admits in his introduction that he has slighted 'the historical or social context in which each approach to sunna has emerged' (p. 5), choosing, instead, to focus on mapping the continuity in themes that have preoccupied Muslim intellectuals. But the costs of such an approach are high. Though he occasionally alludes to the political

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implications of various intellectual positions on the sunna within the contexts of Pakistani and Egyptian politics, he never provides sufficient context for the reader to gauge the political or social significance of these debates for the societies in which they occurred.

Far more serious, he never fully relates these debates to the transformations going on in the modern era among the ulama themselves. The last century, in India and Pakistan at least, has seen dramatic transformations in structures of organisation and communication among the ulama. But Brown never explores the exploding role of print in religious controversy, or the organisational structuring of religious sectarianism in shaping debates on the sunna. Nor does he analyse effectively the impact of colonial rule on structures of religious authority. When he does offer historical context, his assessments are sometimes simplistic. His suggestion, for example, that 'after the middle of the nineteenth century the classical *madhhabs* were replaced in practice by secular, western-inspired law codes' (p. 110), is a serious distortion which ignores entirely the complexities associated with the development of 'Anglo-Muhammadan law' in India, and its influence on the development and meaning of *shari'a*. Cast against an inadequate historical and political background, his attempt to delineate a position he characterises as 'revivalist', is extraordinarily slippery and ill-defined. While he notes the emergence of the *Ahl-i-Hadiih* and *Ahl-i-Qur'an* in India, he never explores the importance of debates on the sunna for the far larger Deobandi and Barelvi positions, nor does he mention these in the context of 'revival'. In looking at the exemplary significance of the Prophet for modern Muslims, he ignores the powerful sufi influences that have strongly shaped modern perceptions of the Prophet, particularly, though hardly exclusively, among the Barelvis. Nowhere do we get a discussion of how popular devotion to the Prophet, or the increasing interest in Prophetic biographies, or *sirah*, have shaped debates on the sunna. Nor is there a discussion of how legal rulings, or *fatwas*, based on interpretations of sunna, have actually influenced Pakistani or Egyptian lives.

None of this is to detract from the skill with which Brown reconstructs an important religious debate. His book is, after all, not a socio-political study, but an intellectual one. But there is a danger that the continuity that Brown perceives in debates on the *sunna* is in fact a product of the narrowness of his scope of analysis. The continuing importance of the 'tradition of the Prophet' in both Egypt and Pakistan needs to be cast in a wider context, even to understand the language and the particular preoccupations of Muslim intellectuals themselves.

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KATE BRITTLEBANK, *Tipu Sultan's Search for Legitimacy: Islam and Kingship in a Hindu Domain*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997, pp. xxii + 184, Rs 450.

Tipu Sultan of Mysore, from the time of his own tumultuous life until the present, has remained a powerful albeit disputed symbol, which various critics and supporters have interpreted in highly contradictory ways. Kate Brittlebank's self-styled 'more realistic presentation of this apparently enigmatic figure' (p. 9) has sought to shift the terms of the debate to Tipu's own goals within his political and cultural context. While Brittlebank briefly recounts Tipu Sultan's career, the heart of her book is her 'holistic analysis' of his 'expression and dialectic of power' (pp. 154, 83): reconstructing Tipu's own representations of himself and his authority.

Brittlebank draws upon Stewart Gordon's model for political legitimacy in eighteenth century India (reprinted in *Marathas, Marauders, and State Formation*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1994, p. 79) to organise much of her analysis. She demonstrates: how Tipu exerted his power to protect or punish his subjects as appropriate, depending on their actions toward him; how he asserted his sovereignty through lavish and calculated displays, drawing upon all the surrounding cultures, creating innovative rituals which demonstrated his legitimacy in a variety of ways, and; how he sought (with limited success) to link himself to established sources of authority including the Mughal Emperor, the Caliph of Islam in Istanbul, Hindu deities and the French royal then republican states. Tipu's fascination with Western crafts, with the tiger and sun icons, and with calendrical, administrative and social reforms, therefore, all comprise components of his projected self-image as central to the universe.

Brittlebank asserts that Tipu believed, as did the people around him, that all aspects of the universe—including astrology, dreams, numerology and the divine—affected him as much as did British or Maratha armies. Especially given the ambiguities of his family's relationship to Mysore's Wodeyar dynasty and his own constantly embattled career, Tipu reached out in all directions seeking resources to legitimise his own rule, resources we might consider symbolic but which seemed very real to him and his subjects. By seeking to control each of these, Tipu was carrying out his unified political agenda. Thus, rather than judging, as others have done, how pro-Islamic, anti-Hindu, anti-Christian, secular, or anti-colonialist was Tipu, Brittlebank has shown persuasively that Tipu favoured or opposed institutions and people primarily on the basis of their relationship to him. In this way, Tipu's destruction of some Hindu temples and patronage of others should not be evidence for Tipu's attitude either for or against Hinduism, but rather reflected how he felt each individual temple affected him and his rule. For example, images in a Narasimha temple near Bangalore of Tipu slaying a tiger, she asserts, reveals an affinity between that temple's

patrons and the self-image that Tipu constructed, and that she has reconstructed. Brittlebank sees 'the syncretic character of religion in the south' of India (p. 56) as especially fostering Tipu's syncretic self-representations.

Overall, Brittlebank's book (a revised Monash University doctoral thesis) clearly lays out and demonstrates her argument. Brittlebank has drawn from a variety of sources, including printed and manuscript English and Persian language texts, architectural forms, costume and coinage. Like the image of Tipu which she has advanced, however, her book remains very much centred on Tipu's ideology and less on the reception of his self-image by others, which might explain why his own syncretic image was forgotten and replaced by highly politicised images of him generated by his enemies and by subsequent commentators. Further, she says little about the less symbolic administrative and martial innovations of his state, such as its efficient bullock-borne military supply system. Nevertheless, she has produced a book that should take a leading role in the ongoing debates about the culture of entrepreneurial rulers in the eighteenth century in particular, and the construction of political authority in pre-modern India in general.

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KRISHNA DUTTA and ANDREW ROBINSON (eds), *Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, pp. xxx + 561, Rs 550.

Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson have jointly produced three works on Rabindranath Tagore so far: all of them are valuable to the scholarly world. They have significantly contributed to a 'revival' of Tagore in the English-speaking world, and they have also created a new parameter of Tagore criticism distinct from bardolatry. This volume, which the editors declare 'our last book on him [Tagore]' is surely the best and the most delightful.

This work is a collection of 346 letters written by Tagore at different times to a wide range of correspondents and on equally wide-ranging subjects. The correspondents include his wife, niece, brothers and friends, and many contemporary Bengali scholars and writers, as well as several international figures. The themes also have an amazing variety, ranging from intensely personal to various political and social and intellectual problems. The greater part of the book consists of letters originally written in English, but the editors have very thoughtfully included translations of a large number of letters which were written in Bengali. The translation has been done with care and competence, retaining the charm and delicacy of the original prose. This volume, therefore, is the first and a successful

attempt at presenting a relatively unknown corpus of Tagore's work in a very comprehensive way. Not only does it combine Tagore's writings in two different languages, underlining the bilingual career of Tagore, but also brings out effectively the passionate attraction of the man for epistle as a congenial form of expression, both personal and intimate, as well as formal and scholarly.

Tagore indeed was a 'man of letters' in a very literary sense. There are people who are obliged to write letters as a part of their social and intellectual activities but hardly go beyond their immediate mundane context. Similarly, letters can be too private, meant to be shared by two persons only: any intrusion into that private world makes one uncomfortable. Tagore wrote letters with great ease and fluency, often with a remarkable display of stylistic flourishes. A significant number of them can be read by others for its sheer artistic quality. He wrote thousands of letters in Bengali: so far, sixteen volumes have been published by Visva-Bharati and the rest will require as many volumes. A large number of them are already in print, published in different journals but yet to be collected in books with proper annotations and commentaries. Among the letters written in English, some are quite well-known, for example the letter to Lord Chelmsford renouncing the knighthood in protest against the massacre at the Jallianwala Bagh. *Letters to A Friend* (1928), a collection of letters written to his British friend C.F. Andrews, who himself edited and wrote an introduction to the book, is the first work in English to introduce Tagore as a letter-writer. An exchange of letters with Gilbert Murray also appeared in a slender volume. Except Mary Lago's well-edited *The Imperfect Encounter* which contains the correspondence between Tagore and William Rothenstein, most of his correspondence in English are yet to receive serious critical attention. Dutta and Robinson's work deserves special acclaim as it opens up a new area of Tagore study.

Letter-writing was a newly discovered art in nineteenth century Bengal and the Bengali writers exploited its artistic potentiality fully. Tagore employed this form very early in his literary career: he wrote many of his travel accounts in this form; he used it as a narratory method in some of his short stories, as he did in social and political discourses as an alternative to the traditional forms of pedantic treatise. He wrote a few delightful letters in verse too. His distinction as a letter-writer, however, rests not on this consciously chosen form and 'artistic' letters but those written with an express purpose of communication between two individuals, letters written to his dear and near ones, most of them being conspicuous by simplicity and spontaneity and occasionally by great beauty. *Chhinna Patra* (Torn Letters), for example, is a collection of letters written by the young Tagore from his estate in East Bengal to his niece is considered by Bengali critics as one of the classics of Modern Bengali prose. Hundreds of other letters, though not of the same class of *Chhinna Patra*, reveal different aspects of

Tagore's thoughts and moods and perceptions, bringing out the complexities of his personality. In fact, the whole corpus of his letters, when viewed in a chronological sequence, appears almost as a coherent text narrating a life lived so intensely.

Dutta and Robinson have presented the corpus of Tagore's letters into eighteen short phases, each highlighting a significant theme. The first letter included here was written in Bengali in 1879 from England to his elder brother, giving his impression about British life and the last—written in English—condoling a mother from his death-bed. The letters in-between, written to various men and women, known and not-so-known, on different themes reflecting different moods, have been connected by useful notes: they read like a coherent narrative and provide a wonderful account of the man whom the editors called 'The Myriad Minded Man', which is also the title of their immensely readable biography of Tagore. Someone like me would have been happier to find more letters of *Chhinna Patra*, at least a few from *Bhanusingher Patrabali* (those charming letters written to a young girl) or his angry statement in response to Eleanor Rathbone's open letter to Indians. But the editors have their own choice and own predilections. Meticulously edited, this volume is certainly an admirable work. The three appendices, though strictly speaking do not have integral connections with the main text, are also valuable, and the nineteen plates, all beautifully produced, have added a visual delight to this welcome book.

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PIETER GORTER, *Small Industrialists, Big Ambitions: Economic and Political Networks on a Large Industrial Estate in West India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1996, pp. 216, Rs 395.

This study deals with the state's promotion of industrial estate programmes and the emergence of a new middle class in India in the last three decades. Gorter did not limit himself to the discussion of the accumulation of *economic* capital, i.e., the advantages of subsidies, infrastructure and multiplier aspects of concentrated industrial activity, but has instead focused on 'how prosperous categories of entrepreneurs seek to translate their economic power into social prestige and political influence' (p. 25). In doing this, he relies on Bourdieu's theory of *social* capital. This means that network analyses and such social attributes as status and being accepted in particular groups are considered important elements in explaining the strategies and aims of new industrialists. Previous studies, it appears, have ignored the social and political significance of the industrial middle groups. This is rather surprising, considering that it is the Indian state which

fostered, for both economic and political reasons, the growth of small-scale industries by promoting industrial estates.

The research was conducted in a large industrial estate located near the town of Vapi in south Gujarat. The government of Gujarat established a few industrial estates in south Gujarat of which Vapi is the largest. In the second chapter, Gorter shows how Vapi developed from a sleepy town, where most trains from Bombay to Ahmedabad did not stop, to 'the largest concentration of small-scale industries in the whole of South Asia'. Nowadays, around twenty-five trains stop at Vapi everyday. The rapid growth of Vapi as an industrial estate started with the founding of the Gujarat Industrial Development Corporation (GIDC) in 1962. The GIDC's main task was to acquire and develop land for industrial purposes. Vapi became an attractive alternative production site particularly for Gujarati industrialists from Bombay, who feared that the Marathi government would discriminate against them. Furthermore, *Bombaywallas* were interested in lower wage rates, low priced land and avoiding labour unrest and strikes.

Gorter distinguishes two categories of industrialists according to their time of arrival in Vapi. The first group consisted of well-established industrialists from Bombay. Their Bombay background enabled them to withstand the isolation of Vapi in the early years. These industrialists were not typically small-scale industrialists; they came from business families with a long history in trade and finance. The first group of nineteen entrepreneurs in Vapi acquired no less than 400 acres and the averages production per unit was Rs 7.2 lakhs (p. 52). The second category of industrialists were those who produced for other units in Vapi. These were smaller industrialists who could only survive after a critical mass of industrial activity had been reached. A growing number of first generation industrialists emerged from this growth. The years between 1975 and 1985 represent a period of rapid growth in the number of small-scale industrialists. Most of them were attracted by generous subsidy schemes, easy credit and increasing protection for the small-scale sector.

The struggle for social prestige through networking is carefully analysed in the fourth chapter. Gorter stresses the 'fall of the big man' of Vapi. Rajubhai Saraf was the founding father of the Vapi Industries Association (VIA) and the Rotary Club of Vapi. His position of prominence was based on seniority, family background and economic strength. He controlled most of the capital and a number of smaller firms on the estate depended on him. However, within fifteen years, Saraf lost much of his social status and was no longer allowed to decide on his own who would be the next chairman of the VIA. In 1983, his suggestion for a new president was challenged by the so-called 'Wednesday clique'. This was an important change in the power structure of the VIA.

Ironically, the 'Wednesday clique' was more or the less promoted by Saraf himself. It was not an official club or organisation, but it was a small

circle of friends invited by Saraf during the early days of the existence of the Vapi Industrial Estate. Saraf was the first to build a guest-house on one of his factories' premises to suit the cosmopolitan tastes of the industrialists from Bombay. Even after other industrialists had done the same, the Wednesday evening gatherings continued and became an informal institution. The 'Wednesday clique' consisted of industrialists only, whereas the Rotary Club included persons from all walks of life, as long as they belonged to the upper class of society. It was, therefore, not surprising that Saraf's dominance within VIA was challenged in the 'Wednesday clique' and not in the Rotary Club, because VIA, like the 'Wednesday clique' represented only industrialists.

There were two main reasons for discontent within the 'Wednesday clique' that ultimately caused the split over the issue of the presidency of the VIA. First of all, over the years Saraf had developed from a small-scale industrialist to a medium-scale industrialist. According to several clique members, he became overbearing and patronising and lost sight of the interest of small-scale industrialists. Second, most members of the clique were no longer economically dependent on Saraf's support. However, the reasons for discontent did not in themselves imply a split in power. The strength of Gorter's thesis lies in the fact that he analyses the strategies of the small-scale industrialists which were used to change the balance of power. The first strategy was to open up the 'Wednesday clique' to newcomers. The second strategy was to proclaim an ideology of 'true' small-scale industrialists, i.e., an anti-establishment ideology.

Meanwhile, VIA became a more prominent and powerful organisation. It was generally accepted as the main representative of Vapi small-scale industrialists in bureaucratic and political circles. Gorter shows us that the leaders of the 'Wednesday clique' became the leaders of VIA because 'they know most people in high places' (p. 137). This explanation does not suffice. Here Gorter emphasises *why* and not *how* networking works. He does not explain how some newcomers were able to gain access to higher levels of bureaucracy, whereas others were not. The question is, of course, whether there is a structure behind the success of newcomers or whether the success of newcomers is merely accidental? Moreover, what is the importance of social capital—compared to their economic potential—in this context? The study is based on 130 interviews of entrepreneurs and government officials. However, the evidence related to the above-mentioned questions remains insufficient. Gorter did not, for example, attend VIA meetings; nor did he have access to the minutes of meetings. He refers only to one VIA Annual Report of VIA (1990–91).

In the fifth and final chapter, Gorter is very optimistic about the 'rise of a new class of capitalists' in India. He suggests that the new entrepreneurs '... have recognised the value of organisation and representation. They are no longer satisfied with getting official business done through personal

contacts and bribes, but are trying to develop a more formal lobby to represent their interests . . .'. Gorter further argues that the BJP's plea for clean politics and an end to corruption together with a common Hindu identity, are the main attractions of this party for small-scale industrialists. However, it is not surprising that industrialists support the ruling party. In most cases, they support several political parties and the ruling party is naturally the most important one for a businessman to support. They are known to 'switch ideology' when necessary, in favour of a new ruling party after elections.

Gorter's study has to be seen in a tradition of the 'Gujarat Studies' conducted by well-known Dutch researchers, including Jan Breman, Mario Rutten and Hein Streefkerk. It is a follow-up to Streefkerk's *Industrial Transition in Rural India* (Bombay, Popular Prakashan, 1985). Although Gorter relies heavily on this study, it is a reaction to it as well. Streefkerk, for example, found a lack of organisational unity and a strong reliance on kinship and caste relations among small-scale entrepreneurs, whereas Gorter emphasises the formal organisation and class-bound orientation of the new middle class. This in itself shows the ongoing discussion on capitalist development in India. Gorter's thesis adds a relatively new element to this discussion by focusing on network analyses. Though several questions remain unanswered, the study is well written and deserves a large academic readership in India.

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WILLIAMSON MURRAY and ALAN R. MILLETT (ed.), *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York, 1996, pp. ix + 428, £45.

Military organisations are regarded as conservative and the generals hide-bound. Yet, military forces change themselves. While the First World War was characterised by trench war, the unique feature of the Second World War was the fast moving *panzer* formations. But, when and why did this transformation occur? Barry Posen in *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain and Germany between the World Wars* (Ithaca, 1984) argues that this metamorphosis occurred in the military doctrines (theories of combat) of the Western powers in the 1930s due to civilian intervention.

Were other aspects of the armed forces transformed? Did other factors influence innovations? The book under review is a collection of essays which tries to fill the gap left by Posen. Like Posen, the editors of the book, W. Murray and A.R. Millett assume that the basic features of the Second

World War emerged between 1919 and 1939. So, the focus remains on the interwar period. However, unlike Posen, the contributors emphasise on the strategic aspects and organisational contexts for analysing military transformations.

The contributors' conceptual framework is influenced by the chaos theory—Ian Stewart's *Does God Play Dice? The Mathematics of Chaos* (Oxford, 1989), which argues that in the cosmos all systems are influenced by chances and so, linear predictabilities are absent. Influenced by it, the essayists argue that history is also chaotic. Human beings tried to bring order out of chaos, but clear predictions were impossible.

They challenge G. Parker's hypothesis of a military revolution. Parker in *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West* (Cambridge, 1988) argues that occasionally in history radical innovations occurred in the armed forces which could be categorised as military revolutions. But Murray and Millet argue that the term 'evolution' instead of 'revolution' is more applicable as the innovations were protracted processes which extended over two-three decades. This was evident in the case of *Blitzkrieg*, the most significant military innovation of the interwar period.

How should one explain the stunning German success in air-land war till 1942? The secret was the new type of combat which the Germans evolved after Versailles, implemented in Poland and perfected in France. This new technique was known as *Bewegungskrieg* (combined arms mobile war) for the German's, and *Blitzkrieg* for the Americans.

Murray, Millet and Barry Watts in their essays in the volume under review argue that the Germans, unlike the British, were able to evolve armoured warfare due to a favourable combination of military, bureaucratic and strategic factors, which was partly accidental. All the armed forces operated in a multipolar environment, which made chalking out particular strategies for them difficult. While strategic specificity encouraged innovation, strategic ambiguity inhibited it. After 1919, the German strategy was to revise Versailles by aggressive war in Europe. So the Germans continuously tinkered with ideas to break the trench stalemate which prevented victory in 1914. The British were confused. While one group was for continental commitment, the other group wanted the British army to function as an imperial police force. This hindered the development of tank units.

Organisational factors interacted with strategies and influenced innovations. The regimental structure of the British army was adequate for colonial warfare but it was an obstacle for initiating the tank-aircraft combined operations evolved by the Germans. Military education was another area. The British officer's corps hated intellectual activities and encouraged polo playing and pig hunting. But the German officers seriously engaged in learning from the past wars.

Finally, chance played an important role. Despite the conducive atmosphere created by strategic and organisational contexts, the Germans were lucky to get Von Seeckt as commander as he was an ardent reformer. But for the British, development of the armour ceased with the appointment of a conservative, Montgomery-Massingberd, as army chief.

This reviewer disagrees with the book in some respects. To explain confusions and contradictions in military affairs, there is no need to borrow from the chaos theory. About 150 years before the rise of this theory, the Prussian military philosopher, Carl von Clausewitz challenged the notions of linearity and predictability in warfare. To explain chaos and anarchy in human activities, Clausewitz introduced the concepts of 'fog' and 'friction'. He derived such ideas from the Counter-Enlightenment in early nineteenth century Germany, which stressed that diverse reality cannot be explained by laws and principles of universal validity.

Revolution is a better concept than evolution for explaining military transformations. Total break with the past never occurred. But in a particular period, when discontinuities exceeded continuities, we can assume a break to have occurred. If we take a long-term view of history, then we can categorise *Blitzkrieg* as a revolution because it evolved in less than a decade. It is erroneous to trace the roots of *Blitzkrieg* to 1919 because then the Germans were thinking of defensive infantry war. After 1933, the *Wehrmacht* thought in terms of offensive *panzer* battles and then the velocity of rearmament rapidly increased. The core of the *Blitzkrieg* theory, i.e., using mobility, surprise and firepower against the enemy, evolved in 1937.

This book makes an intervention in two of the most important debates going on among military historians. One is the 'revolution versus evolution' debate which we have referred earlier, and the other is the 'continuity-discontinuity' debate. The continuity school's advocate, G.D. Sheffield in 'Blitzkrieg and Attrition: Land Operations in Europe, 1914-45', in McInnes and Sheffield (eds), *Warfare in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1988), pp. 51-76, argues that the Second World War was a continuation of the First World War, as the basic elements of *Blitzkrieg* emerged in 1917-18. However, the monograph under review proves beyond doubt that the Second World War was a break since the *Blitzkrieg* grew after 1919. Among the scholars, social determinism has replaced Marxist economism. This study goes a long way to prove that organisations and the unforeseen are important variables in history.

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SUMIT SARKAR, *Writing Social History*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997, pp. 390, Rs 495.

These essays on social history in late colonial India reflect a certain evolution in the thinking of Sumit Sarkar, an established and original thinker in Indian history. Professor Sarkar started out as a Marxist historian with a flexible awareness of social and cultural factors in history. His magnum opus, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal* (1973), belongs to this early phase. It was a work remarkable for its sensitivity to culture at a time when Marxist historians all too often stuck to a rigid and mechanistic materialist interpretation of history. Subsequently, he adopted a 'history from below' approach, and the result was a brief alliance with the *Subaltern Studies* school which emerged in the 1980s. His universally read textbook, *Modern India 1885-1947* (1983), reflects this alliance, based on a mutual concern with the history of the lower orders and their mentality. However, as it became increasingly evident that the subaltern historians had broken away from the Marxist fold, and, even more alarmingly for him, adopted a post-modernist approach which posed a challenge to rational and progressive values, there was a parting of the ways. These essays reflect this break; they also exhibit his new and original experimentations with a richly nuanced social history still wedded to enlightened, radical sentiments in the aftermath of the collapse of world communism. The demolition of the Babri Masjid, the ambiguous reaction of the Subaltern School, and Sarkar's determined stand against the RSS-BJP-VHP combine underscored the break.

Historiographically and ideologically, Sarkar is of the view that the Subaltern School degenerated from an initial concern with the 'subaltern' to an anti-state, anti-modern concern with the community. In the process, words like 'secular', 'rational' or 'progressive' became terms of ridicule in the hands of these new communitarians. The broader community of non-Marxist historians, headed by such figures as Ashin Das Gupta, Dharma Kumar and Ravinder Kumar, are wedded to secular and progressive values from a liberal standpoint. Sumit Sarkar's attachment to these same values emanates from his earlier Marxist background. In his view, subaltern historians may mildly valorise resistance by the lower orders, but they no longer advocate the radical social transformation to which he is still attached as a Marxist intellectual. Liberal historians share with him a concern for the secular fabric of Indian society. The trajectory of Sarkar's evolution as a historian has been determined by these redefinitions of attitudes.

In the essays under review, Sarkar has given us a highly sensitive portrayal of the impact of Western colonial domination on certain sections of Bengali society. He dwells on the impact of clock-time and print-culture and shows how these factors redefined the world of two depressed figures

in Badralok society—the clerk and the pandit. He further warns historians against the facile assumption that the pre-colonial ‘popular’ was an area of freedom of the mind; on the contrary, it was penetrated by Brahmanical patriarchy and public control of private life. In this, he reveals his uneasy awareness of the fact that current critiques of the ‘Bengal Renaissance’ have targeted modernity rather than capitalistic colonialism. The new work discipline and clock time gave rise to a sense of oppression in the world of the clerk and fostered visions of a desired apocalypse. At the same time, alarming images of the liberated woman and a perceived connection between the disorderly woman and the modern craze for money led to a profound social reaction. The meagre fruits of subordinate service fostered both resentments and apocalyptic visions, and reinforced anti-woman attitudes. In particular, there was a perceived connection between *Kamini* (surrender of the greedy, liberated woman), *Kanchan* (the craze for money) and *chakri* (subordinate service, with all its humiliations under the rule of the sahib). In many of these attitudes, the clerk was backed by the villager, as for instance when *goalas* beat up a widow marriage party in Vidyasagar’s home village.

Two long essays, one on Vidyasagar and the other on Ramakrishna, exhibit Sarkar’s mastery of the craft of the historian. Vidyasagar had a surprisingly radical gender ethic for his age—‘an ideal norm of compassionate conjugality based on adult mutual love’ flowing from what he himself termed ‘a unity of minds’. But such was the society in which he acted that the widow marriages which his campaign brought about were ‘arranged marriages’, arranged, furthermore, by commercial ‘go-betweens’ (*ghataks*). Despite his excellent contacts with high British officials, an informal alliance between the state machinery at the local level and landlords of the locality frustrated his movement even in an area where he could be reckoned to be influential. Eventually, ‘husbands of our choice’ did not prove to be the lot of the Bengali widows.

Sarkar’s superb essay on Ramakrishna explores the contradictions of bhadralok life and the obscure connections between the village culture and the new religious movements. He shows that gender is central to the understanding of both Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. Ramakrishna inhabited a world mentally far removed from that of Vidyasagar. His was a world in which women were desexualised and looked upon exclusively as maternal figures. In line with an old tradition, he insisted on abjuring *Kamini* and *Kanchan*: his condemnation of *Kamini*, *Kanchan* and *Chakri*, however, reflected a new colonial situation. The mixture of derision and deference characteristic of the clerk’s attitude to the boss was curiously reflected in this village seer’s attitude to the bhadralok of Calcutta. The shift from Ramakrishna to Vivekananda was a shift from a quietistic, inward-looking bhakti to its opposite, a new muscular Hinduism.

Sarkar's commitment to the struggle against reactionary, fundamentalist forces is evident throughout the book; his distancing from the subaltern historians is reinforced by the same commitment.

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NANDINI SUNDAR, *Subalterns and Sovereigns: An Anthropological History of Bastar, 1854–1996*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997, pp. 256 Rs 495.

For good or ill, humankind has made, and continues to make, the epic journey from hunting and gathering to the market economy. In her striking monograph, Nandini Sundar documents this passage in the former princely state of Bastar, once attached to the British Central Provinces, and now a commissioner's division in the successor state of Madhya Pradesh.

Sundar has constructed a text remarkable for its honesty and common-sense. In painting the background, she dispels the view that Bastar's pre-colonial past was stagnant and motionless, or the area isolated from the larger economy and polity. To her, there was a 'sense of ceaseless movement', in which 'a mosaic of people' of considerable 'linguistic and cultural hybridity' migrated, settled, enjoyed relations with neighbouring states, joined armies or retreated into the forests. The author similarly dismisses any notion of 'harmonious pre-capitalist village communities' in Bastar.

Sundar's story unfolds. She went to Bastar as a literary activist, determined to use her writing to aid the 'suffering masses'. She has emerged with a text (no less helpful to the people of Bastar) in which she has 'tried to understand the process' whereby her subjects lost access to water, land and forests at the hands of English and Indian officials, immigrant settlers and business folk. Though deeply sympathetic to 'the people', Sundar does not descend to breast-beating. Nor does she conjure up a once-upon-a-time Eden in Bastar, or blame 'the British', or, indeed, anyone. There are no villains or heroes. The author is wise enough to see that what is done cannot be undone; and that even the future remains uncertain. There is no activist quick fix here.

Sundar approaches her narrative from a variety of standpoints. In places, she writes as an anthropologist working in the field with live subjects; in others, as a historian whose text depends on archival research. In her concern with capitalism and latter-day development, Sundar is an economist; and, in her preoccupation with the dialogue between the state and the people, she is the political analyst. The author's studies of group behaviour reflect the concerns of the sociologist. The result is a richly complex story, akin to 'total' history.

Sundar takes the wide view, sweeping her text across pre-history through recorded time and into the future. These three time 'zones' determine the sections into which the book is divided. In the first, the author evokes pre-colonial Bastar through oral history, popular mythology and traditional rituals. The second section, on the colonial and post-Independence past, focuses on three protests by people against increasing restrictions on their traditional preserves. Each act of resistance had its own rationale: in 1876, the people appealed to the notion of a 'just king'; in 1910, they rebelled against 'the entire colonial apparatus', and; in 1966, people rallied around their former raja to protest against the policies of the Indian state, the police shooting the raja in the process. In her third section, Sundar reviews the themes of the book, to declare the people of Bastar 'strangers in their own land', though their future remains open.

In describing the crossover of civilisations in Bastar, Sundar makes some important points. One is her juxtaposition of a traditional polity, where the state is the person(s) in power, and the 'British' view of the state as an 'objective' entity with officials and institutions to mediate its policies. This is all excellently done. But as we seem to have all but returned to the 'native' view whereby the state is the party in power (albeit with a 'British' veneer), the distinction between the pre- and post-colonial state may be much less than the author supposes, though she does hint at the idea with her repeated references to Congress politicians and governments.

Sundar naturally gives prime place to capitalism and development taking place in Bastar. She knows that these processes, conceived as attempts to redress stagnation and tap Bastar's resources for the wider market, have reduced the people's access to these resources. At the same time, Sundar recognizes that 'tribals' gain and lose in capitalism; that they, too, may exploit resources, and even consume products made elsewhere; that the post-colonial state has reduced the scope for the 'genuine articulation of popular demands', and; that access to land can 'no longer be mediated in the old way'. She, nonetheless, places her faith in 'democratic rights', and; in a history that is not closed, but whose 'rationale is provided by the future'. Your reviewer cannot imagine a more even-handed approach.

Sundar's text has a deeply human quality. Though her story is a 'familiar' one, she has sought to 'people' the process, 'to bring to this tale . . . [people's] courage, humour, cunning and fortitude'. Her better photos serve the same purpose. Sundar loves Bastar and its people, and is thus in a position to understand, and to help administrators, academics and activists to understand. A more polemical approach would make this less possible.

This reviewer offers several comments in conclusion. The multiplication of sub-sections within individual chapters, which are themselves part of larger sections, obstructs the flow of the text somewhat. More seriously, there is a hint of parochialism in Sundar's insider-outsider dichotomy, for we live in a world where almost everyone is descended from immigrants into 'someone else's' land. Similarly, the issue of development is not as

simple as Sundar believes, for even the most basic urban facilities utilise the resources of a part of the country (someone else's?) where we do not live. In a different vein, Sundar is at one with journalists who are unable to spell Chhattisgarh!

Despite these, Sundar has made a positive and original contribution to the history of central India and of its 'tribal' people in particular.

David Baker
Delhi



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The limited adoption of European-style military forces by eighteenth century rulers in India

Stewart Gordon

University of Michigan

Introductory Perspective

In the late eighteenth century in India, the forces of indigenous rulers ranged from cavalry without infantry or artillery, through cavalry supported by artillery, to mixed infantry and cavalry, to infantry with irregular cavalry. This variety continued, in spite of convincing demonstrations of the military superiority of European-style artillery and infantry forces more than 30 years earlier in campaigns involving the British and the French. The central question is, by the opening of the nineteenth century, why had so few Indian rulers adopted the European system?

The answers take us away from abstract questions of military 'efficiency' to the actual complexities of the introduction of a new technology and new military organisation. A successful military system from outside the society causes rethinking, refocusing of resources, and other sorts of stress in a society and, thus, illuminates the complex, changing and often contradictory symbolical systems which surround and embed both the existing and the challenging military systems.¹ In the India of the eighteenth century, we can conceive of each court as a micro theatre in which real rulers and

Acknowledgements: I wish to acknowledge Dr Stephen Markel, Acting Curator of South Asian Art, Los Angeles County Museum, for assistance in using Mughal paintings to supplement the well-known textual sources for Mughal military history. I also wish to thank Col David Sa'adah (US Army, retired) for sharing his expertise on eighteenth century European warfare.

¹ The issue of the 'embedding' of a technology in ideas and ideology have been admirably explored in two recent books; Wiebe E Bijker, *Shaping Technology/Building Society*, Cambridge, Mass., 1992, and *idem*, *The Social Construction of Technological Systems*, Cambridge, Mass., 1987.

nobles weighed and contested full or partial adoption of a new military system against a variety of symbolic and structural changes and their perceived costs.²

The Weaponry of Mughal India

As a point of departure, let us consider Mughal armies, from Bahur's invading force which reached the Indian plains in the first decade of the sixteenth century through Akbar's at the end of the sixteenth century. Most obviously, this was an army of cavalry. Out of the Central Asian background, men (and women) learned to ride as early as they could walk. Most extant paintings of the Mughals at war or on the hunt show them on horseback. Babur, hearing of an opportunity for conquest more than 150 miles away, described the whirlwind activities of the next three days, as follows:

Off we hurried, that very hour—it was sunset—without reflecting, without a moment's delay Through that night it was rushed without delaying anywhere, and on next day until at the Mid-day Prayer, halt was made There we cooled down our horses and gave them corn. We rode out again at beat of (twilight) drum and on through that night till shoot of dawn, and through the next day till sunset, and on through that night till, just before dawn, we were . . . [at] Marghinan.³

Unlike infantry, cavalry could travel vast distances, choose where and when to fight, and disengage in an orderly, rapid, strategic retreat. Mughals were, thus, a late manifestation of an earlier and highly successful revolution in military technology, horseback warfare, of the Central Asian steppe nomads. Out of these grasslands, so productive for raising horses, had come the Huns, various Turkish bands and the Mongols (under Ghenghis Khan and his successors) who invaded west into Europe, east into China, and south into the Levant.

In this tradition, the Mughals took horse grading and branding seriously. The top grade was Turki horse, followed by the Yabu, Tazi and Jangalah. The top three were larger, stronger breeds imported into India, and the lowest category was a smaller, locally-bred horse.⁴

² This approach avoids consideration of overall 'superiority' or 'inferiority' of non-Western technology, a not very productive question, but one which has generated much literature, both in the West and Asia. See William McNeil, *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force and Society since A.D. 1000*, Oxford, 1983. Also, A. Dharampal, *Indian Science and Technology in the Eighteenth Century*, Delhi, 1971; Deepak Kumar, *Science and the Raj, 1857-1905*, Oxford, 1995.

³ *Baburnama*, trans. A. S. Beveridge, Delhi, 1989 rpt, pp. 99-100.

⁴ Rafi A. Alavi, 'New Light on Mughal Cavalry', in *Medieval India: A Miscellany*, Volume 2, Aligarh, 1972, pp. 73-74; see also William Irvine, *The Army of the Indian Moghals: Its Organisation and Administration*, Delhi, 1962 rpt, p. 52.

Every man brings his own horse and offers himself to be inlisted [*sic*]. The horse; and not the man, is carefully examined; and according to the size and value of the beast, the master receives his pay.⁵

The downgrading of locally-bred horses was a result of how the Mughals defined warfare.

Cavalry meant heavy cavalry. A trooper normally wore linen quilting and chain mail, a helmet, plus a breastplate, back-plate, and two side plates, leg plates, arm plates, a neckpiece and gauntlets.

The principal weapon of this heavily armoured soldier on horseback was the bow, particularly the short, reverse-curve bow common to Persia and Central Asia. Recent scientific experiments have shown that this bow delivers substantially more penetrating power than any but the largest and heaviest longbows.⁶ Often it was made of composite materials such as wood and horn, which made it even more powerful. Unlike the longbow, it could, of course, be used from horseback. It is archery practice with the reverse-curve bow which we find both in Mughal normative texts on military practice and in actual descriptions of the daily round of Mughal armies.⁷

Mughal swords were curved swords, effective only for slashing from horseback. This curved sword appears in many depictions of the Mughal emperor, even when he was at leisure in his harem.⁸ Along with swords and daggers, ornate quivers and horse trappings were routinely given to honour meritorious actions.

And what of firearms in Mughal armies? They were not generally central to battle. This is corroborated in Babur's memoirs, as well as the court chronicles of his successors, Humayun and Akbar. Matchlocks had serious problems; they were heavy, inaccurate, slow to load, and could not be used from horseback.⁹ Even well into the seventeenth century, a cavalryman could get off six arrows in the time it took to fire a single shot from a matchlock.¹⁰ Matchlocks were basically relegated to the infantry, indigenously-recruited units held in such contempt that they were listed along with litter bearers, carpenters, wood-cutters and cotton carders in the military pay records.¹¹ The only campaigns in which honourable cavalry routinely

⁵ Robert Orme, *Historical Fragments of the Mogul Empire*, London, 1805, p. 418

⁶ Edward McEwen, Robert L. Miller and Christopher A. Bergman, 'Early Bow Design and Construction', *Scientific American*, June 1991, pp. 76-82

⁷ For other representations of this type of army in camp and in battle, see P. Pal, *Court Paintings of India, 16th-19th Centuries*, New York, 1983; see also, Michael Brand and Glenn D. Lowry, *Akbar's India: Art from the Mughal City of Victory*, New York, 1986

⁸ Vishaka N. Desai, *Life at Court. Art for India's Rulers, 16th-19th Centuries*, Boston, 1985, Plate 71

⁹ Mughal paintings show these early shoulder arms in use from covered platforms mounted on the backs of elephants, but mainly in hunting.

¹⁰ Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire, A.D. 1656-1668*, second edition (revised by Vincent A. Smith), Delhi, 1989 rpt

¹¹ Irvine, *The Army of the Indian Moghals*, p. 155

used shoulder arms were in areas of difficult terrain, such as the riverine areas of eastern Bengal and the Himalayan hills.¹²

Lastly, consider artillery. In virtually all paintings showing Mughal battles of the late sixteenth century, guns seem completely unintegrated into the swirl of cavalry charges.¹³ Documentary sources support the visual evidence that guns were slow to fire (on the order of a couple of times an hour), inaccurate, and far too heavy to move in support of cavalry movements.¹⁴ For Babur, perhaps their most important use was for holding off the initial charges of the Rajput cavalry in the battle of Khanwa (1527). Nevertheless, the battle was won by the Mughals by cavalry charge with bow and arrow and hand-to-hand combat.¹⁵ These early guns were, in fact, much more effective against forts than they were in plains battles, and this is how they are often portrayed in the paintings of the period.¹⁶ Like the infantry, the artillery branch had little prestige or chance of advancement; it was mainly staffed by 'Portuguese, English, Dutch, Germans, and French; fugitives from Goa, and from the Dutch and English companies'.¹⁷

The optimal battle situation for such an army was on the plains, where the cavalry could manoeuvre, wheel, and charge. Tactics divided the cavalry into 'wings', plus a designated vanguard and reserve. Artillery was drawn up in front and usually opened the battle, but was too heavy to move with the fighting of the remainder of the day. The main tactic was the massed charge (to the accompaniment of huge drums), using first bow and arrow, followed by hand-to-hand combat with sword. If the line weakened, the commander (watching from his elephant) sent in reserves. The battle was decided by the death, capture or retreat of the commander, after which his army fled, leaving tents, baggage, reserve horses, the bazaar and guns as loot for the winning side.

¹² The use of matchlocks in river warfare in Bengal is illustrated in a dispersed page from the Beatty Collection *Akbarnama* now in the Cincinnati Museum. See Ellen S. Smart and Daniel S. Walker, *The Pride of Princes: Indian Art of the Mughal Era in the Cincinnati Art Museum*, Cincinnati, 1985. Documentary evidence corroborating this portrayal is found throughout the many battles described by Mirza Nathan, who served in Bengal for 20 years in the reign of Jahangir. See *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi*, trans. M. I. Borah, Assam, 1936.

¹³ See, for example, G. N. Pant, *Mughal Weapons in the Baburnama*, New Delhi, 1989, Plate I.

¹⁴ For example, see the static arrangement of the artillery in 'A'zam Khan captures Fort Dharur' from the *Royal Library*, Windsor Castle, fol. 91b, published in P. Pal, *Master Artists of the Imperial Mughal Court*, Bombay, 1991, p. 143.

¹⁵ J. N. Sarker, *Military History of India*, Calcutta, 1960, p. 47.

¹⁶ See, for example, the famous *Akbarnama* painting by Miskina and Paras of a cannon being dragged up to the siege of Ranthambor, Victoria and Albert Museum, Acc. No. 72/117, published, among other places, in Geeti Sen, *Paintings from the Akbar Nama: A Visual Chronicle of Mughal India*, Calcutta, 1984.

¹⁷ Bernier, *Travels*, p. 217.

Paying Armies in Mughal India: Loot, *Mansabdari* and *Watan*

For the early Mughal armies, as under Babur, loot was the most common source of pay of troopers. Loot of a nearby countryside was as common as loot following a battle. The choice of battle site was often dictated by the availability of nearby populated countryside to loot. From the nomadic background of the Mughals, we find the expected tension between the mobility and freedom of the conquering war band and the desire for stable on-going revenue. Thus, whenever Babur held a region for even one agricultural season, he promptly allotted various sections and villages to his main leaders, as their 'places' for maintenance. Babur is especially poignant on this subject. 'It passed through my mind that to wander from mountain to mountain, homeless and houseless, without country or abiding place, had nothing to recommend it.'¹⁸

The ordinary, ongoing processes of military service in India were surprisingly similar to Babur's 'placing' of his leaders. At least as early as the fourteenth century, large groups of armed men indigenous to India sought military service, were willing to move long distances to find it and shared an ethos of service.¹⁹ Men and families sought military service for pay, booty, status and honour—but principally as entrepreneurial activity. Men joined armies for the chance to establish hereditary rights to revenue by written appointment from the ruler they served.²⁰ They fought to get or enhance their *watan*, a word used across all of India (except the extreme south) to mean core familial rights to revenue, deeply tied to sense of place.²¹

To get a clearer understanding of this South Asian *watan* process, let us look briefly at the records of the Mane family of southern Maharashtra, who served the Bijapur Sultanate in the seventeenth century, and whose *watan* was the area around the town of Mhasvad.

A cluster of documents from 1666–67 shows the dependence of the Adil Shah government on the Manes for local military forces and their forces in larger campaigns.

¹⁸ *Baburnama*, p. 153.

¹⁹ Dirk H.A. Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan, 1450–1850*, Cambridge, 1990

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 63–64.

²¹ The first choice of term to describe the receipt of local land rights in return for military service might have been *iqta*. This term describes precisely the relationship between a Muslim ruler and his military followers, from the first Muslim invasions of India onwards. When the relationship moved beyond the Muslim followers to indigenous local militarised families, it was rarely termed *iqta*; more commonly, these groups termed the relationship *watan*. I have, therefore, chosen to use the term *watan*. See Richard Eaton, 'Iqta tenure in the Deccan in the age of Timur', Paper Presented at the Conference on South Asia, Madison, 1996, unpublished

Sayyad Ilias Saya Khan, commander, pleased with the valour of Rataji Narsingrao Mane in repulsing the attack of Mirza Raja Jai Singh on Bijapur, recommended to Ali Adil Shah II [Sultan of Bijapur] that the *deshmukhi* watan of Kasbe Kaladhon be granted to Rataji Mane. So a watan sanad is issued.²²

April 1666

Note the term *deshmukh* used in this quote. Literally, it translates as 'mouth of the land'; with its use, all governments of the time recognised that these militarised local families were much more than government appointees. Their rights as *deshmukh* often went to a family who had either settled and developed vacant land or been instrumental in resettling land after it became vacant through war or famine. Note, also, that the location of this new grant of *deshmukh* in Kaladhon was in the area immediately adjacent to the core area of the Mane family holdings.

Other papers of the same months in 1766 illustrate the use of Rataji Mane's troops closer to home.

Ali Adil Shah II writes to Rataji [that] these villages are troubled by Naiji Pandre, who has claimed that he has the mokassa grant and began collecting the revenue, by force. So, proceed immediately on receipt of the firman (order), with the necessary force and give stern warning to Punjaji Jamadar, who represents said Naiji Pandre. Expel him, and warn him not to come again . . . Inform us accordingly.²³

Two months later, in recognition of expelling Naiji Pandre from the district, Rataji Mane was rewarded with robes of honour from the Bijapur court. 'Wear it and be honoured; you have done good service.'

In the next year, Rataji undertook two more tasks using his troops to enforce the authority of Bijapur. At the request of Ali Adil Shah II, he drove out one Kandoji from his village which had been resumed by the Adil Shahi government. A month later, Rataji was instructed by the Adil Shahi ruler to warn two Nimbalkar brothers that they should leave as they were disrupting territory belonging to Ali Adil Shah II. Presumably, Rataji completed both tasks, because he was later rewarded with robes of honour.

It hardly matters where one tracks similar family documents of men in military service in the Indian regions of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bengal, Malwa or Maharashtra—this is the dominant pattern. These local cavalry were a ruler's most important source of troops in the countryside, probably more valuable than troops housed in the forts of the area. Muslim sultans and Hindu rajas alike used these armed local families to repel invaders, disarm rebels and join other troops as main force fighting units of the

²² D.A. Pawar, ed., *Tarabalkalin Kagadpatre*, Kolhapur, 1969, p. 124. Translation mine, with the assistance of Dr Shirosh Chikte.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

kingdom. Close ties between ruler and family included personal audiences frequent letters, robes of honour and, most important, written contracts to rights in their local *watan* area.

I want to emphasise several features of this system. First, in any region, the number of families involved in this system was large. On the central plains area of Malwa (roughly 120 miles by 150 miles), a Mughal heartland, more than 80 named, armed families possessed administrative functions similar to the Mane family of Maharashtra. All had at least mud-walled fortified houses. More than a dozen had significant stone forts. If we include the hilly areas of eastern and western Malwa, the number doubles.²⁴

Second, this system of local troops was deeply intertwined with the rhythm of the Indian agricultural year. Monsoon was the time of year for planting and harvesting; whether or not the local military family did it themselves, they had an intimate interest in the results. The end of monsoon and the Dussehra festival were the time for meeting, mustering and campaigning. Though these troops were 'available' for campaigns, they were primarily available in their local area. Kings Knew this; if one tracks the military activities of any of these armed families, once settled, they rarely travelled more than 50 miles from home, and not in monsoon.

Third, this whole system was defined by cavalry, men on horses. Horse-mounted locally-based service was an indigenous Indian tradition. Pay at the beginning of campaign was called 'stirrup money'. We have only to look at the hero stones of the tenth to thirteenth centuries from local areas of Karnataka and Maharashtra, or tribal areas of Central India and Rajasthan, to see that the local hero and protector was mounted on horseback.²⁵ It was horse-mounted service (and its attendant *watan* rewards) which differentiated the family from the surrounding peasant cultivators. Virtually all the symbols of honour granted by kings to *watan*-holders were associated with the horse—especially *khilat* (robes of honour), but also horses, saddles, daggers and standards.²⁶

Fourth, in spite of the weakening of the Mughal empire in the first half of the eighteenth century, this *watan* system was strengthening. Across all of northern India, Mughal officials were busily turning their regional jobs into local *watans*. In the riverine areas and foothills of northern India, local militarised families were strengthening their *watans* by eliminating detailed

²⁴ W.H. Tone, who travelled through Khandesh in the late eighteenth century, counted 20 forts in the course of a day's march. W.H. Tone, *Illustrations of Some Institutions of the Maratha People*, London, 1818, p. 9.

²⁵ S. Settar and Gunther D. Sontheimer, *Memorial Stones: A Study of their Origin, Significance and Variety*, Dharwad and Heidelberg, 1982.

²⁶ It is well known that Shivaji, founder of the Maratha polity, had infantry in nearly equivalent numbers to his cavalry and that these troops were important in battles which centred on forts in Maharashtra. Nevertheless, soon after Shivaji's death, warfare between the Mughals and the Marathas dictated rapid movement on horseback, and the infantry dwindled.

revenue data which formerly flowed to the Mughal court.²⁷ Perhaps even more interesting, during the seventeenth century, the whole ethos of horse service and its symbols of honour had reached people never before associated with it and was used as a means of upward social mobility. For example, in broad areas of tribal Central India, the horse-based ethos of Rajput kings displaced the indigenous tribal ethos of kingship. The process of tribals aspiring (often successfully) to become Rajputs had begun.²⁸ In Maharashtra, horse service in the Deccan Sultanates had deeply changed the self-image of various castes into something known as 'Maratha'; it was the common traditions and symbols of cavalry service which differentiated the 'Marathas' from relatives who were cultivators, ironworkers, or shepherds.²⁹

In summary, whereas both muskets and artillery were thoroughly embedded in an indigenous military system of symbols, practice and honour, well before the advent of the new European system in the mid-eighteenth century, cavalry was the high-prestige, high-pay branch of military service. Local militarised families pledged cavalry service against lucrative shares of local government taxation. For rulers, these forces were the principal troops in the countryside, performing police duties and joining main force armies. The symbols of honour such as robes and swords were overwhelmingly associated with horse service.

Some small evidence indicates that muskets were starting to be considered 'honourable', when carried by cavalry, who dismounted and fired.³⁰ Infantry, nevertheless, remained low-pay, low-prestige and rarely decisive in battle.³¹

The foot soldiers receive the smallest pay; and, to be sure, the musketeers cut a sorry figure at the best of times, which may be said to be when squatting on the ground, and resting their muskets on a kind of wooden fork Even then, they are terribly afraid of burning their eyes or their long beards, and above all lest some Dgen, or evil spirit, should cause the bursting of their musket.³²

²⁷ Muzaffar Alam, 'Eastern India in the early eighteenth century "crisis"', Some evidence from Bihar', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 28 (1), 1991, pp. 53–55.

²⁸ Surajit Sinha, 'State formation and Rajput myth in tribal central India', *Man in India*, Vol. 42 (1), January–March, 1962, pp. 35–75.

²⁹ See the extensive discussion of the coalescence of the Maratha caste in Stewart Gordon, 'Zones of military entrepreneurship in India, 1500–1700', in *idem*, *Marathas, Marauders, and State Formation in Eighteenth-Century India*, Delhi, 1994.

³⁰ This appears to be the case in two mid-eighteenth century paintings, one from Central India and one from the Himalayan hills. See P. Pal, *Court Paintings of India*, Plate R. 33; see also, B N Goswamy and Eberhard Fischer, *Pahari Masters. Court Painters of Northern India*, Zurich, 1992, Plate 97.

³¹ In looking at hundreds of images of Mughal and Deccan Sultanate rulers, it seems striking that I have yet to see a ruler with a firearm either in a battle or a courtly setting. The only context in which royalty regularly used firearms seems to have been hunting, rulers were, however proud of good marksmanship, and had their kills recorded in official memoirs.

³² Bernier, *Travels*, p. 217.

Artillery remained equally low-status, if somewhat higher paid. There had, however, been solid progress in integrating the use of field guns. Mughal artillery was generally respected and feared by other Indian powers throughout the later half of the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth century. Indeed, some nobles of the seventeenth century were quite committed to the development of artillery. The best known of these was Mir Jumla, the nobleman from the Muslim state of Bijapur (in southern India) who took up Mughal service when that state was annexed. Nevertheless, guns remained heavy and slow-firing, and of limited use on the mobile battlefield dominated by cavalry. Above all, like the infantry, there was no honour or hope of gaining local tax rights for artillery service.

The European Military System Reaches India

This is the military world into which the Europeans introduced their system of warfare in the middle of the eighteenth century. Let us briefly summarise the military situation in Europe. After 1500, developments occurred in metallurgy and gun casting, the crossbow and pike and the musket, all responses to the dominance of heavy cavalry. Continual warfare spurred all manner of experiments in technology, strategy, tactics and organisation. By the opening of the sixteenth century, massed firepower of infantry could sometimes prevail against massed heavy cavalry. In the next century, muskets and pikemen still got in each other's way and were occasionally overrun by heavy cavalry. With lighter guns came the technical solution: simply attach the pike to the gun as a bayonet. Sporadic firing gave way to organised firing on command. Drill, uniforms, officer training schools and many other refinements preceded the system's introduction into India.³³

By the late seventeenth century, massed infantry formed the centre of battle. This massed firepower was arranged five to six men deep, the front man firing and moving to the back to reload. Reloading was slow and cumbersome, though muskets got lighter and faster to load through the course of the eighteenth century. This massing of muskets was extremely lethal against cavalry. However, the range was short, no more than 80 yards at best. By the mid-eighteenth century, Europe's best armies could

³³ For our purposes, it is enough that European armies arriving in India were quite different in organisation and focus than indigenous Indian ones. I wish to avoid the issue of whether there was a military 'revolution' in Europe in the seventeenth century. The debate goes back more than 20 years now, though Geoffrey Parker's *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West*, Cambridge, 1998, is less than a decade old. The discussion is well summarised in C. Rogers, ed., *The Military Revolution. The Debate*, Boulder, 1995. Recently, some historians have moved the 'revolution' backwards and forwards from the early Middle Ages to World War I. Other historians are rethinking the whole concept. See John A. Lynn, 'The evolution of army style in the modern west, 800–2000', *The International History Review*, Vol. 17(3), August, 1996.

sustain three rounds per minute per man. With this rate of fire, the lines thinned down to two or three men deep and stretched out.

Battlefield success, in large part, depended on rate of fire, and, therefore, training, discipline and a command structure which clearly differentiated 'officers' from 'men'. By the seventeenth century, the European knightly code of honour, with its symbols associated with individual combat and heavy cavalry had been almost entirely supplanted by a structure of honours and rewards (such as colours and insignia) for officers of infantry units.

In Europe of the late seventeenth century, artillery was still heavy and cumbersome. Over the next 50 years, however, especially in France, England and Prussia, developments in artillery were quite rapid, especially with government standardisation of bore, ball weight and firing procedure. The results were much lighter, more accurate field pieces which could keep up with marching infantry. By mid-century, these light, rapidly firing field pieces were placed at the ends of the lines of infantry to fire at an angle down the opposing lines.

What about the role of the cavalry? Commanders generally counted on the cavalry for the decisive blow to finish a battle. Recall, for example, each of Marlborough's field battles, which ended in one or several cavalry charges breaking through the opposing lines.

Cavalry was massed, in tight formation, and intended as a kind of rapidly moving, lethal battering ram aimed against the centre of opposing infantry lines.³⁴ Cavalry used in this manner—highly disciplined, tight formations, charging the infantry lines—remained the dominant pattern throughout the eighteenth century. In part, this strategy was dictated by the men available. Recruited peasants did not have horsemanship in their backgrounds; therefore, cavalry manoeuvres were relatively simple and a matter of learned drill (much like the loading of a firearm); they were only effective with massed numbers and discipline. Most cavalry units sacrificed speed to order and only attained a gallop at the very end of a charge.³⁵ The crucial point here is that European cavalry had a different training, structure and battlefield dynamic than cavalry warfare as practised by 'men of the horse' in India.

Let us now turn our attention to the English in India before the build up of forces caused by the worldwide campaigns between the British and the

³⁴ This argument generally follows Russell F. Weigley, *The Age of Battles: The Quest for Decisive Warfare from Breitenfeld to Waterloo*, Bloomington, 1991.

³⁵ In the course of the eighteenth century in Europe, cavalry gradually became less central as the rate of infantry and artillery fire improved. Especially important were efforts to improve the battlefield mobility of infantry and the introduction of lighter horse-drawn artillery in the closing decades of the eighteenth century. Some infantry units of necessity were operating without cavalry, but all would have preferred having it—for skirmishing, for foraging, for frontal attacks, for flanking actions, even for filling holes in the infantry line.

French in the middle decades of the eighteenth century. From small units guarding the trading factories, forces had grown to substantial size in the 1660–1680 period. For example, Bengal had a standing military of 250 infantry, supplemented by two companies of natives (a total of 135 men) and 21 pieces of cannon. Bombay had 400 Royal troops, plus two companies of Rajputs at 100 men each.³⁶

Indigenous rulers were well aware that these European traders were not like other foreign traders; they came armed and represented kings. In the late seventeenth century, a seasoned administrator of an indigenous kingdom wrote this advice to his sovereign:

Amongst the merchants, the Portuguese and the English and the Dutch and the French and the Danes and other hat-wearing merchants also do carry on trade and commerce. But they are not like other merchants: Their masters, every one of them, are ruling kings These hat-wearers have full ambition to enter into these provinces to increase their territories They should strictly never be given places to settle Their strength lies in navy, guns and ammunition.³⁷

There had been, thus, many decades of military experimentation by the English (including the recruitment of indigenous forces) by the mid-eighteenth century build up. During these same decades, there had been wary observation of the Europeans by indigenous rulers, but relatively few occasions to see large units in warfare.

All of this changed with the French–English warfare of the mid-eighteenth century. The French and the British brought in and raised much larger units, and put them into battle. (Clive brought 2,400 men to the Battle of Buxar in 1757.)³⁸ The successes of these regimental units included Bussy's campaigns in the Carnatic and Maharashtra, British victories in Bengal and Oudh, and the swift British capture of Surat.³⁹ The European command structure allowed the unit to carry on even if the leader were injured or killed. In contrast to indigenous armies, the European units could, if necessary, retreat in order without rout.

Regiments in India operated without cavalry; it was difficult and expensive to bring horses from Europe. Experience had shown that trained

³⁶ Major Madan Paul Singh, *Indian Army under the East India Company*, New Delhi, 1976, p. 2.

³⁷ 'The Ajnapatra or Royal Edict', trans. S.V. Puntambekar, *Journal of Indian History*, Vol. 8 (2), August, 1929, pp. 212–13.

³⁸ For example, Bombay received orders to raise seven companies of 80 men each, plus an artillery company with 100 gunners. Singh, *Indian Army*, p. 5.

³⁹ John Lynn types the British and French armies which arrived in India in the mid-eighteenth century as 'state commission armies' characterised by much more sophisticated military administration, mainly paid professional troops, purchase of commissions, and lack of national or patriotic commitments. Lynn, 'Evolution', p. 537.

musketeers, backed by artillery, could defeat much larger numbers of indigenous cavalry. The East India Company had experimented with indigenous cavalry, found it useful at the Battle of Buxar, but disbanded the units in 1765, genuinely afraid of what would happen if indigenous cavalry learned the techniques of massed attack which overran infantry in Europe.

The progress that the natives make in the knowledge of art of war, both in Bengal and on the coast of Coromandel is becoming a very alarming circumstance, and we are not without apprehensions the consequence of teaching them cavalry exercise.⁴⁰

In East India Company forces, there would be only a very small number of cavalry and no European units until the first decade of the nineteenth century.

The English were aware that they held a technical advantage in artillery and took vigorous steps to prevent any non-English learning their gun casting and firing techniques. The Court of Directors ordered the dismissal of all non-English foreigners and natives from artillery service and wrote, as follows:

No foreigner whether in our service or not . . . nor any Indian or person of mixed breed, nor any Roman Catholic of what nation whatsoever, shall on any pretense be admitted to set foot on the laboratory or any military magazine either out of curiosity or to be employed in them, or to come near to them so as to see what is going on or contained therein.⁴¹

Indian rulers quickly became aware of the convincing demonstrations of effectiveness of this new infantry/artillery system. For example, the Peshwa (the de facto ruler of one of the largest states in India), when negotiating with the British envoy from Bombay in 1756, 'expressed a definite desire to have a body of English troops and artillery in the same manner as Mohamed Ali of Arcot had been favoured by Madras'.⁴²

Rulers were equally aware that it was not only technology they wanted; it was a whole regimental system of military organisation, including uniforms and symbols, discipline and training, command structure and battle array. They knew that this knowledge was the provenance of foreigners. If the earliest response of Indian rulers was to hire the whole system from either the English or the French, the second response was to hire Europeans who knew the system. Within a decade, some enthusiastic indigenous emulations of the regimental system emerged. Probably the best known is Mir Qasim in Bengal, who raised 25,000 infantry under Walter Reinhard

⁴⁰ Singh, *Indian Army*, p. 5.

⁴¹ Quoted in Singh, *Indian Army*, p. 5.

⁴² W.S. Desai, *Bombay and the Marathas up to 1774*, New Delhi, 1970, p. 154.

and a regiment of gunners under Europeans. Unfortunately, much less is known about Ibrahim Gardi, who raised a similar unit at Hyderabad, based on his experience serving with Bussy in the Carnatic and Maharashtra campaigns (this unit was destroyed at the Third Battle of Panipat, 1761).

Indian Rulers and the New Military

In the second half of the eighteenth century, however, the responses of Indian rulers to the European regimental system ranged all the way from full adoption to complete rejection. Tipu Sultan's forces, for example, had uniforms, an officer corps, insignia, training manuals and an order of battle comparable to any European army of the day.⁴³ No other Indian ruler of the late eighteenth century went that far. For example, Mahadji Shinde's infantry battalions (approximately 8,000 men under the Frenchman, De Boigne) were mixed with 20,000 cavalry raised by the older *watan* system. Some rulers, such as Hyderabad and Oudh, simply hired European units and kept them separate from the rest of the army. Others, such as the Peshwa, failed at hiring European units and employed Muslims trained in the new system. Still other rulers, such as Mulhar Rao Holkar in the 1760s, developed only artillery and did not hire Europeans or attempt to raise European-style infantry. Many rulers, such as the Bhonsles of Nagpur, chose completely to ignore the new system and continued to recruit cavalry on the older *watan* system throughout the eighteenth century.

Let me suggest that there were three reasons for this variety of response and that each individual response was in its way correct. First, along with convincing shows of strength under the best of conditions, there were equally convincing failures of the new infantry/artillery system. There were problems of scale. Small units of under 200 men (larger if unsupported by artillery) could not sustain a rate of fire necessary to stop a cavalry charge.

More serious were problems of terrain. In 1772, the British expeditionary force struggling up the Western Ghats was effectively attacked by the Peshwa's Maratha cavalry. Equally serious were problems of supply. This new army could not survive by foraging, and required a regular supply of grain and ammunition. The two major defeats of the new armies in Maharashtra. Bussy's near Aurangabad in the 1750s and the British force in the early 1770s, resulted from the cutting off of supplies (tactics which had been relatively successful against the Mughals for 100 years). Finally, as was broadly known in the eighteenth century, the new troops were cash-expensive. A campaign was as likely to stop because of lack of credit as any other reason.

⁴³ There was universal respect by Tipu's European opponents for his military organisation, training and battle tactics. He has received some recent scholarly attention. See P. Barua, 'Military developments in India, 1750-1850', *Journal of Military History*, Vol. 58, November, 1994, pp. 600-604.

Perhaps most serious, and completely unexamined in the scholarly literature on the Indian military in the eighteenth century was the problem of the bad fit between the infantry/artillery system and the expectations of honour and reward for a ruler's own nobles and military. Indigenous military service in India in the eighteenth century had a very specific dynamic and symbolic content. If we track, for example, the career of Malhar Rao Holkar or Mahadji Shinde (prominent Maratha generals of the mid-eighteenth century) from the 1720s, the accoutrements and rewards of horse service are obvious. Each started as a young trooper, mustering at the end of monsoon, in a small contingent led by a relative. Through personal bravery and leadership, both received booty and the ceremonial objects conferring honour, such as ornate robes, daggers, horses and trappings. They also received the real rewards of service, rights to the government's share of revenue; in this case, both received rights in the compact region of northern Maharashtra. Advancement was very rapid, and within a decade of initial service, both men were leading large contingents of cavalry, having received the revenue grants to support them, mainly in central India.⁴⁴

If we compare this cavalry-based scenario to the new infantry, such rapid advancement, such symbolic and material rewards were not possible for an ordinary infantry soldier; he was but a musket in a mass of firepower. There was no scope for individual bravery and initiative which might come to the notice of the ruler. Thus, the main effect of using these new forces was to sever the intimate relations of horse-based personal service, honour, legitimacy and reward which bound together a ruler and service military families.

In the new infantry/artillery system, only officers could claim rights to government's share of the revenue. Indeed, several Europeans, including de Boigne, Perron and Walter Reinhard, gained large estates and rights to shares of taxes. It is no surprise that these officers were treated with suspicion and hostility by Indian nobles; they were upstarts and direct rivals.⁴⁵

In states not adopting the regimental system, throughout the second half of the eighteenth century, new families continued to rise from obscurity through service and advancement in the older cavalry-based *watan* system. For example, we have families such as the Rastes and Patwardhans in southern Maharashtra, the Rajput states on the western rim of Malwa and the Muslim state of Bhopal in eastern Madhya Pradesh.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Stewart Gordon, *The Marathas, 1600–1818*, Cambridge, 1993, pp. 117–18.

⁴⁵ C.B. Baillie Fraser, *Military Memoirs of Lt. Col. Skinner*, London, 1851, pp. 188–90.

⁴⁶ The enormous overland horse trade, which every observer noted in the seventeenth century, simply continued in the eighteenth, in the form of large annual horse fairs. See Stephen F. Dale, *Indian Merchants and Eurasian Trade, 1600–1750*, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 25–26.

Conclusions

By the opening of the nineteenth century, as Barua has pointed out, there had been considerable learning by both the European colonial armies and their opposing Indian rulers. English commanders learned that the most effective way to weaken the opposition was a negotiated switch of loyalties.⁴⁷ English commanders knew that because of improvements in their artillery, forts were no longer the sites of decisive battles. Calcutta, Madras and Bombay had learned that the real stakes of war were taxation rights, not trading rights. They further learned that the indigenous banking system was capable of providing enough credit, pledged against future tax revenues, for a large campaign, and was capable of delivering cash to the field. Commanders well understood the rhythm of the campaigning season and the necessity of monsoon shelter.

On the Indian side, there had also been considerable learning. Like European kings, Indian rulers knew only too well the vagaries of armies loyal to kinsmen or based on 'feudal' levies. In the late eighteenth century, Indian rulers learned that loyalty could be bought with regular cash salaries, training, and uniforms. They understood the value of a unit which could retreat without rout. Many built armouries and regular garrisons for the troops during monsoon. Like their European opponents, Indian rulers developed relations with indigenous bankers capable of advancing the cash necessary to pay the troops.

Nevertheless, the unsolvable problem for Indian rulers went beyond strategy or military organisation. Real commitment to the new system (Shinde, Tipu, Ranjit Singh) meant jettisoning the older nobility and the *watan* structure on which it was based. This was true for two reasons. To pay the new European-style forces, the ruler needed the revenue alienated to nobles in *watan*. Also, the new battles gave no scope for the older nobility to prove their prowess and enhance their *watans*. The Peshwa's newswriter at Shinde's court (in the early 1780s) recognised the problem when he wrote, as follows:

As for his army expenditure, the Maratha forces from the Deccan have been suffering appalling miseries which I am unable to describe in words. They are not able to pay off their debts even by selling their horses. A trooper hardly gets Rs 10 a month; how can he live on this? Mahadji [Shinde] has spent tremendously on his new regiments of infantry, but his eminent Maratha assistants, who laid down their lives capturing Gohad and Gwalior, have suffered terrible destitution.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Barua, 'Developments', pp 613-14

⁴⁸ Quoted in G S Sardesai, *Main Currents of Maratha History*, Bombay, revised edition, 1949, p. 148.

Throughout the 1780s, Shinde dropped Maratha cavalry which had been recruited by the old *watan* system and hired Muslims, Rajputs and Gosains on cash salaries.⁴⁹

The strongest commitment to the new style of army appears to have come from rulers with the least overall commitment to an older *watan*-based nobility. Illegitimate heirs such as Shinde, usurpers such as Tipu, Ranjit Singh as the leader of a 'peasant' based movement, pretenders such as Ragnath Rao, and women rulers such as Begam Samru readily adopted the new forces, sometimes initially against their own hostile nobility and local militarised groups.

It is also noteworthy that the new forces were adopted only by larger territorial rulers. Rulers throughout India seemed well aware that only large states, with prospects of regular income, could afford to pay European officers and the infantry. Perhaps smaller states were also aware that the new system was only effective in large scale, and that a long-term commitment to a substantial regular flow of cash required a tax-collecting and credit structure beyond their means.

Throughout the eighteenth century, there is little evidence that rulers developed new symbolic structures to tie infantry in bonds of legitimacy and loyalty, as the older horse-based honours of robes, daggers, trappings and jewels had tied the cavalry to the king. The important exception was Tipu Sultan, who developed regimental colours, medals and a whole range of honours associated with European armies of the time.⁵⁰ Crucially, no Indian ruler was able to convert his *watan*-based cavalry leaders into efficient, trained, well rewarded leaders of infantry units. All Indian rulers were forced to rely on Europeans, whose loyalty was never tied to the ruler with the complex of symbols, landholding, and often kinship which tied the king to the older nobility.

In the eighteenth century, a king experienced problems whichever military system he chose. He either cobbled nobles and local military families into an effective cavalry force by the *watan* system or tried to find enough taxes and creditors to pay the wages of the new artillery/infantry units. Neither path was 'right' or 'wrong'. Each king, pretender, or usurper made his best judgement about his situation.

Finally, I wish to emphasise that adoption of the European regimental system was not the deciding factor in a state's survival. Eighteenth and early nineteenth century India was not some sort of Darwinian situation,

⁴⁹ The British Resident thought that Shinde was but little inconvenienced by the desertion of the unpaid Maratha troops and their leaders, as others were readily available. See India Office Library, Bengal Political and Secret Proceedings, June–September 1786, pp. 476–80.

⁵⁰ Indian rulers, by and large, retained the same horse-based honours right through the British conquest of India. See Kate Brittlebank, 'Curiosities, conspicuous piety and the maker of time: Some aspects of kingship in eighteenth-century South India', *South Asia*, Vol. 16 (2), 1993, pp. 45–46.

with those states adopting the new system somehow forcing out 'conservatives' who retained the older cavalry system. If we track the survival of states as princely states into the nineteenth century, some of the militarily adaptive states like Shinde survived, some like Tipu did not. Likewise, hundreds of the smaller states based on cavalry and familial entrepreneurship survived as princely states in the nineteenth century. If anything, many more of the states based on *watan* and cavalry survived because they threatened British colonial power far less than larger states with infantry forces, such as Ranjit Singh's Punjab or Tipu's Mysore.

Collective bargaining under the common law tradition in Madras in the interwar period

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One of the controversies in the study of industrial labour in colonial India is how far the relationship between an industrial employer and his employees is explicable in terms of contract. Industrial jurisprudence makes a pointed reference to the suit filed in 1920 in the Madras High Court by Binny and Co. against the Madras Labour Union, but has no discussion of the forms of action and methods of collective bargaining in the colonial period.¹ In spite of the fact that industrial law contains strong elements of the common law tradition,² that is, customary law, there is no discussion of this aspect of the law and collective bargaining. Even in the recent writings of labour historians there is very little attempt made to study law as part of the growth of trade unionism. This is perhaps due to the fact that most of the literature focuses on the exercise of managerial power at the workplace and on the 'communal' outlook of the pre-capitalist workers in the colonial context.³ Preoccupation with these questions has led to the neglect of the study of the tradition of common law employment contracts.

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¹ Arjun P Aggarwal, *Indian and American Labour Legislation and Practices: A Comparative Study*, Bombay, 1966, p. 11.

² O.P. Malhotra, *The Law of Industrial Disputes*, Vol. 2, Bombay, 1973, pp. 569–618.

³ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working Class History: Bengal 1890–1940*, Delhi, 1989, pp. 155–85.

In this article an attempt is made to analyse the patterns of collective action and the evolution and strengthening of the contract of service under the common law tradition. The focus is on how far the prerogatives and rights of the employers conflicted with the rights and interests of the working class. The context of the industrial struggle provides much better scope for analysis than the courtroom decisions which were anyway very few.

Section I gives an outline of common law tradition. Section II deals with the economic interests of the working class. Section III analyses the methods of collective action, and the controversy regarding the legality of such action. Section IV discusses in detail the conflicts of the rights of the employers and the workers. Section V analyses the nature of industrial violence in the overall framework of the common law employment contract.

I

There was a strong homogeneous European employers class in Madras cemented by the bonds of racial and economic interests.⁴ Standard legal references show that even in the advanced liberal democracies the contract of service does not imply the absolute freedom of the worker.⁵ Any definition of the contract of service must start with how such definition was used in Britain itself in 1924.

In fact 'the contract of service' implies an obligation to serve and it comprises some degree of control by the master. The court do not ignore other factors such as the power of dismissals; the right of selection; the character of the task; the method of payment and the right to withhold it all are relevant to the decision of the fact whether the contract is one of the service or not. But 'the final test, if there be a final test and certainly the test to be generally applied', said a judge in 1924, 'lies in the nature and degree of detailed control over the person alleged to be a servant'.⁶

The contract of employment was an agreement between an employer and a worker which may be an oral expression or agreement in writing.⁷ The most important feature of this agreement was the wage contract between the employer and worker; the worker was paid in cash and not in kind as was characteristic of pre-capitalist relations. The use of the word 'contract' presupposes the freedom of individuals to bargain and settle the terms of agreement, but there was a vast gap between the formal equality of parties free to make a contract as they wish, and the actual inequality

⁴ A.K. Bagchi, *Private Investment in India, 1900-1939*, Cambridge, 1972, pp. 170, 189-91.

⁵ Joe England and Brian Weeks, 'Trade Unions and the State: A Review of the Crisis', in W.E.J. MacCarthy, ed., *Trade Unions*, London, 1985, pp. 408-9.

⁶ K.W. Wedderburn, *The Worker and the Law*, Harmondsworth, 1965, p. 34.

⁷ Frank Tillayard, *The Worker and the State*, London, 1918, p. 16.

and lack of freedom caused by stark differences of economic bargaining power.⁸

In the customs and usages of the times as defined by the courts in colonial India, the concept of contract of service evolved from the English common law and even today the agreement between the employer and worker is a 'gentleman's agreement binding in honour only, not enforceable in a court of law'.⁹

The courts in colonial India followed the common law tradition of Britain. For instance, the High Court of Calcutta used the criterion of customs or usage to define the contract of employment and establish the right of the affected party to seek three months' notice instead of one month from the management, before he was relieved of his duties. The court ruled in *G.H. Wittenbaker vs J.C. Galstaun and others* in 1917:

Usage is proved by the oral evidence of those who become cognisant of its existence by reason of their occupation in the particular trade or business and the evidence establishing custom or usage must be clear, convincing and consistent, and to prove an usage in particular trade it must be shown that the usage is consistent and reasonable and was universally acquiesced in and that everybody acknowledged it in the trade and knew of it or might know of it if he took the pains to enquire.¹⁰

The plaintiff was a teacher whose service was terminated by the management of the Armenian College in Calcutta on one month's notice. He was appointed for a period of three years. After the expiry of the period, he continued to work as a master for some months and his services were then dispensed with, at one month's notice. It was held by Justice Greaves of the Calcutta High Court that in the absence of a special agreement a master in a college was entitled to 'reasonable notice' on his service being dispensed with. One month's notice in an employment of that kind was not reasonable unless in cases of 'misconduct', 'insubordination', 'insobriety', or 'neglect of duties'.¹¹

This was based on the principle enunciated in *Todd vs Kerrich* which was decided 65 years ago in 1852 in Britain,¹² that general practices followed widely in trade or business could acquire the force of law. Thus, the contract of service with any employer was determined by two considerations: the status of employment, that is, teaching and the terms and conditions of employment which included the length of notice. But that was not common

⁸ W. Friedmann, *Law in a Changing Society*, London, 1972, p. 128.

⁹ O. Kahn-Freund, 'Legal Framework', in Allan Flanders and H.A. Clegg, eds, *The System of Industrial Relations in Great Britain*, London, 1954, p. 57.

¹⁰ *All India Reporter* (hereafter *A.I.R.*), 1918, Calcutta, p. 340.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

¹² (1852) 8 Ex. 151-22 L.J. Ex. 1. cited in *A.I.R.*, 1918, p. 340.

in all trades. In particular in industries such as printing presses which employed a large number of workers, next only to the cotton mills in Madras,¹³ the usage was that the employer hired and fired the workers at his own conveniences, his actions being determined by the requirements of his business strategy.¹⁴ In September 1932, the services of two coolies who had put in more than 15 years of service with a *dubash*, a trading merchant in Madras, were terminated without notice, or wages in lieu of. The two coolies called on the *dubash* through an advocate for payment of one month's wages in lieu of notice according to established or known practice. On his refusal to pay this, a civil suit was filed against the *dubash* in the High Court of Madras. Unfortunately for the workers, the suit was not decided in their favour.¹⁵

In such cases it was not the absence of contract which was created by the wage system but the lack of any social insurance or job security which characterised the contract of service in that period. In the *dubash* case, one of the terms was that in case of miscellaneous expenditure incurred by the workers in the firm, 4 annas could be deducted from their wages and added to the common fund from which that miscellaneous expenditure could be met. It was not meant to be a provident fund or any other fund which could be paid back on the death of a worker or on discharge of him. These conditions were made known to the coolies as well as the workers when they signed the contract of service.

Thus, once the terms were written into the contract the court refused to interfere in these matters as settled and binding.¹⁶ But problems always arose as to the interpretation of the terms of contract. Sometimes the ramifications of these terms were not made known to the workers. As a consequence, disputes arose over the managerial policy of terminating the services of the workmen without notice or wages in lieu of.

The State's Discriminatory Role

The government passed pro-capital legislation like the Employers Act and the Workmen's (Disputes) Act of 1860 and the Workmen's Breach of Contract Act of 1859.¹⁷ The colonial magistrates interpreted these Acts rigidly and inflicted severe penalties on those who had broken away from the employers in protest against the harsh terms of contract. Even an individual withdrawal of labour was mistakenly identified with collective

¹³ *Census of India*, 1921, Vol. XIII, Part 2, Madras, pp 291-98.

¹⁴ Government Order (hereafter G O) 2493, L, 8 October 1938, Development, Tamil Nadu State Archives (hereafter TNA).

¹⁵ G O 2734, L, 15 December 1933, PW & L, TNA

¹⁶ Hugh Collins, *Marxism and Law*, London, 1981, pp 59-60

¹⁷ N Pattabiraman, 'Trade Unionism in India', unpublished M Litt thesis, Department of Economics, University of Madras, 1955, p 218

withdrawal of labour and was declared unlawful.¹⁸ It was only in the 1890s that the government had passed protective legislation to check flagrant abuses, such as employment of children and long working hours.¹⁹

As most of the industrial units in Madras were small,²⁰ the employers or their managers exercised direct control over their workmen. The recruitment and training of workmen was carried out under their direct supervision.²¹ All these functions were done without any statutory regulation. By this means the employers claimed prerogative, a surrogate for a detailed exercise of control over workmen in all matters at workplace.

Even in the 1920s words like 'employer' and 'employee' were but a cloak for 'master' and 'servant' and the employer had unlimited power to regulate his workmen's employment,²² mainly because the contract of employment was a contract between the individual workman and the employer.

Even though the contract of service was voluntary, a strike against the employer's policies or for a wage increase was considered a breach of contract and an act of 'insubordination'.²³ Any attempt by a trade union to combine workmen and induce them to strike was considered unlawful, since, under common law, strikes involved the violation of the terms of contract to work entered into by individual workmen with their employers.²⁴ This was the underlying premise of the suit filed by the management of the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills against the Madras Labour Union in 1920. The management filed an action against B.P. Wadia, labour organiser, and nine other members of the strike committee of the union for Rs 75,000 damages and for a permanent injunction restraining the union from 'continuing and giving effect to their alleged conspiracy to maliciously injure the Buckingham mill and restraining them from holding meetings of mill's workmen and procuring them to break their contract'.²⁵ In this case, Justice Philips of the Madras High Court held the view that the strike committee of the union induced the men to break their contracts; that it was legitimate to infer from 'the words and actions of its members that the committee was formed with that object, thus making it a conspiracy of those intent on inducing the workmen to violate their contract'.²⁶

¹⁸ *The Queen Empress vs Inderjit*, XL 1LR, Allahabad 262, 1889.

¹⁹ Charles A. Myers, *Industrial Relations in India*, Bombay, 1954, p. 242

²⁰ *Census of India*, 1921, Vol. XIII, Part 2, Madras, pp 291-98

²¹ V.N. Natarajan, 'Industrial Labour in the City of Madras', unpublished M. Litt. thesis, Department of Economics, University of Madras, Chapter 1.

²² K.W. Wedderburn, *The Worker and the Law*, p. 34.

²³ D. Veeraragavan and T. Thangappan, 'Class Conflict and the Colonial State in Madras Presidency up to 1981', *South Asia Bulletin*, Vol. 10 (1), 1990, pp. 3-5

²⁴ Ludwig Teller, *The Law Governing Labour Disputes and Collective Bargaining*, Vol. I, New York, 1940, p. 107

²⁵ *New India*, 18 November 1920

²⁶ Rohini Mohan Chaudhari, *The Evolution of Indian Industries*, Calcutta, 1939, p. 25

This was based on common law tradition where an interference with trade or employment with intent to injure by persons acting in combination which causes damage is an actionable conspiracy though the interference was carried out by means of acts which in themselves were not unlawful. But a mercantile combination in England which sought to crush its rivals by undercutting them, by offering special advantages to persons who dealt exclusively with members of the combination and by refusing to employ agents who acted for the rivals, was held to be justified on the ground of furtherance of legitimate trade interests.²⁷

Not recognising this feature of the common law employment contract which bound the employer to his workman individually, some labour historians have revived the old orthodoxy that the pre-capitalist culture of India inhibited the collective action of the working class and that the 'bourgeois' notion of contract had not taken root in colonial India.²⁸ But contrary to this stereotype, what was remarkable about this period was that the patterns of collective action substantially modified the relation of the employer to his workman and gave rise to the substitution of collective agreements for individual contract.

II

Under the common law tradition in England, industrial conflict is divided into two categories: conflicts of interests and conflicts of rights. Conflicts of interests (settlement of agreements) involve the laying down of new standards, for example, an economic dispute of the type exemplified by a trade union demand for a wage increase or fixing of a piece-rate for a new process. Conflicts of rights (interpretation of agreements) refer to disputes over seniority of employment, or dismissals or other disciplinary measures.²⁹ But in Madras the boundaries between these two areas overlapped and at times merged since there was no procedure or mechanism developed in the firms to deal with disputes of a particular category. Yet, in every industrial conflict the boundaries between these two were identified and demarcated.

Conflicts of Interests

Bargaining for Piece-rates: In Madras, a very wide field remained unregulated, in the field of wage bargaining under the Factory Act of 1922. This Act stipulated that no person must be employed for more than 60 hours in any week or for more than 11 hours in any one day.³⁰ But the

²⁷ W.M. Geldart, *Elements of English Law*, London, 1933, p. 218

²⁸ R.K. Das, *Principles and Problems of Indian Labour Legislation*, Calcutta, 1938, p. 175; Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working Class*, p. 141

²⁹ O. Kahn-Freund, 'Intergroup Conflicts and their Settlement', *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 5, 1954, p. 205.

³⁰ P.P. Pillai, *India and the International Labour Organisation*, Patna, 1931, p. 123

statutory maximum of hours was not accompanied by even a statutory minimum of wages for workmen.

There was no question of negotiation over wages since negotiation entailed recognition of trade union representatives to discuss the question of wages with the management.³¹ Indeed, individual bargaining was the normal method of contract-making and wage-fixing. One enquiry noted that

The wages are apparently the result of the initial bargaining at the time when the particular labourer offers himself for employment and such subsequent increments as the management have been giving to individuals or to departments from time to time according to its ideas.³²

Another report recorded that 'there is no agreement nor uniformity of system among different industrial concerns of the same kind or regarding the fixing of wages'.³³ Nor was the role of the state any guide in matters of wages. The Chief Inspector of Factories, Madras, deposed to the Royal Commission of Labour: 'we do not supervise the payment of wages; it is the factory owner's business, not mine'.³⁴ The reason was that standardisation of wages presupposed the standardisation of work as well. Since different work practices prevailed in most of the industrial units,³⁵ the standardisation of wages was difficult to achieve.³⁶

It was further complicated by the different systems of wage payment. Despite the fact that master-jobbers were absent in Madras, the piece-work system was common in European-owned units like the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills, though some of the departments were also organised on time-rate.³⁷ Payment by results presented more advantages to employers since (a) the differential in rates between time-rates and piece-work could be reduced, and (b) productivity and quality of output would be improved. The change from time-rates to piece-rates was intended to cut wage costs. Of course, there was an important time element in the calculation of piece-rates while productivity was hardly ignored in the fixing of time-rate wages.³⁸

But more serious problems were often encountered in the calculation of piece wages in a poorly organised firm like the Madras United Spinning

³¹ *Royal Commission of Labour*, Vol. VIII, Part 2, oral evidence, Madras Presidency and Coorg, London, 1930, pp 272-76.

³² G.O. 651, 16 March 1939, Development, TNA.

³³ G.O. 2684, L. 20 September 1929, PW and L, TNA.

³⁴ *Royal Commission of Labour*, p. 268.

³⁵ The report of the General Superintendent, Public Works Department Workshop, 13 February 1930, File No. 2953 (7) of 1927, Department of Industry and Labour (hereafter I and L) National Archives of India, New Delhi (hereafter NAI)

³⁶ The industrial award of Jaganath Das, in G.O. 651, 16 March 1939, Development, TNA.

³⁷ *Royal Commission of Labour*, pp 272-76.

³⁸ G.O. 651, 16 March 1939, Development, TNA.

and Weaving Mills.³⁹ The workers in the weaving section of these mills run by a Parsi entrepreneur had to strike to revise their scale of wages. Their main complaints were: (a) wages were not in proportion to the work turned out; (b) the wages fell considerably as a result of the cutting-down by the management of the rates per unit; and (c) accounts for the actual work turned out by each weaver were not properly maintained by the management.⁴⁰ Added to these problems was the management's decision to introduce the two-loom system. The output of the second loom was paid for at 50 per cent rates, but the workers demanded 75 per cent. Since direct negotiations between the management and the Madras Labour Union did not resolve these questions, an expert committee of three members, one of whom was the Manager of the Carnatic Mills, was constituted in 1928 to study the problems the workers faced. The 'opinion' of the expert committee had 'no legal obligation', nor was it binding on the employer or the workers. The committee recommended 80 per cent for the two-loom workers.⁴¹

The reasons for change from time-rate to piece-rate systems varied from firm to firm. While well-managed firms like the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills wanted to introduce piece-work in all departments on the ground that workers themselves desired such a change for higher wages, some Indian firms tried to introduce piece work in the departments on the ground that time-rate workers were causing damage to machines and slowing down production. Such changes often met with resistance.⁴² Jaganath Das, an advocate in the Madras High Court, who was appointed as one-man court of enquiry to study this particular aspect of the workers' problems in the Shree Ganasher Aluminium Company noted in his report that the change to the piece-work system would prove 'detrimental to the sound labour relations' as the system as it existed was 'evolved over a long period establishing sound convention in industrial relations'.⁴³

Thus, the relation between productivity and wage was not the only point of dispute; it was equally associated with demands for a greater say in managerial decisions in such matters as control of work. The post-war inflationary period saw a rash of strikes and forced the government to institute courts of enquiry on an ad hoc basis to decide the scale of wages and other benefits. Their awards partly accepted the demands of the

³⁹ G.O. 1366 (1-5), L (Confidential), 26 April 1930, Department of Public Works and Labour (hereafter PW and L), TNA.

⁴⁰ G.O. 120, L 17 January 1929, PW and L, TNA.

⁴¹ Labour Commissioner's letter, 17 August 1928, in G.O. 120, L, 17 January 1929, PW and L, TNA.

⁴² G.O. 384, 11 February 1938, Development, G.O. 1876, 2 August 1938, Development, TNA.

⁴³ G.O. 651, 16 March 1939, Development, TNA.

worker.⁴⁴ The issues related to the institution of provident fund,⁴⁵ parity of wages and standardisation of working conditions.⁴⁶ In return for these concessions, some strike settlements carried a clause banning strikes for at least one year and seeking compliance with the orders of the management.

In 1937, when the Congress assumed power in the Madras Presidency, expectations of a fair deal from the government were high among the working class.⁴⁷ Strikes broke out in various firms throughout the Madras Presidency forcing the government to institute courts of enquiry and boards of conciliation under the Indian Trade Disputes Act of 1929.⁴⁸

The existence of diverse work practices and systems of wage payment were evolved over a period of time in different firms. But the courts of enquiry addressed these questions on an individual basis considering the capacity of the firm and the size of the market for its products.⁴⁹ On one board of conciliation report which did not concede the demands of the Madras United Spinning and Weaving Mills workers, the Madras Labour Union noted:

The chairman of the Board was inspired by prejudice from the outset against their demands, and was openly contemptuous. And one member is known not only for his hostility to labour but his ignorance of labour questions is profound. The third member could not muster courage to assert his views. The report bristles with inaccuracies, with misstatements of facts, with inadequate appreciation of the evidence.⁵⁰

This was an unfair criticism of the board which attempted to conciliate the dispute and at the same time to keep the mills working. But this attempt proved futile and the mills soon went into liquidation.⁵¹

In other cases, the courts of enquiry and boards of conciliation operated, handing down their awards on the wages and other welfare measures.⁵² In one significant instance, the court of enquiry asked the Swedish management of the Western India Match Factory, Madras, to accept the workers' demand for holidays with pay noting:

⁴⁴ Home Political Deposit (hereafter Home Poll Deposit), File No. 84, December 1920, NAI.

⁴⁵ G O 120, L, 17 January 1929, PW and L, TNA.

⁴⁶ *Swadesamitran*, 24 May 1920.

⁴⁷ G O 1378, 18 June 1937, Development, TNA.

⁴⁸ G O 651, 16 March 1939, Development, TNA.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*

⁵⁰ G O 1876, 2 August 1938, Development, TNA.

⁵¹ *The Indian Express*, 10 July 1939.

⁵² G O 120, L, 17 January 1929, PW and L, TNA.

The company could be bound to grant them and no other go would be left to it. But it is nowhere stated that if there is no legislation there should be no holidays with pay. The other companies do not appear to have waited for legislation in the matter.³³

In this way the courts of enquiry and boards of conciliation under the Trade Disputes Act of 1929 were able to improve the conditions of the workers in various firms. Of course, the awards of boards of conciliation or findings of courts of enquiry were not binding either on the employers or the workers. In fact, the government itself expressed its inability to force the employers to implement the awards of boards of conciliation, in case of the employer's refusal to accept the awards.³⁴

The collective agreements provided for rates of pay, holidays, gratuity or provident fund schemes and other fringe benefits and, in the case of women employees, maternity benefits. Such collective agreements were negotiated by the trade unions as the workers' agents though the employers refused initially to deal with them.³⁵ Thus, power of trade unions increased between 1937 and 1939. This was the first stage in the substitution of collective agreements for individual contracts. The collective agreements embodied the rights and obligations of the workers as well as of the employers.

III

Legality of Collective Action

The negotiation of agreements which replaced the individual contracts in the common law tradition involved certain forms of collective action, the legality of which was questioned by the government and the employers. Under the common law not only were the demands of the workers to be reasonable, but the methods they used to advocate and bargain with the employers should also be reasonable. There were three distinct yet inter-related strategies of struggle, each of which was forged in relation to the employer's policies.

Sit-in-Method: With the growth of trade unions the organisation of strikes took a definite shape, and to counter the employers' policies, the working class resorted to unique methods of resistance. One was the sit-in-method or 'ca canny' method.³⁶ Sit-in strike has been defined as occurring

³³ G.O. 1859 (173-176), 30 July 1938, Development, TNA.

³⁴ V.V. Giri's note, 13 October 1938, in G.O. 2493, 8 October 1938, Development, TNA.

³⁵ G.O. 2356, 21 September 1938, Development, TNA.

³⁶ Home Poll Deposit. File No. 84, December 1920, NAI, Home Poll Deposit. File No. 70, September 1920, NAI; Claude Markovits claims that the sit-in-method spread from Bombay

whenever a group of employees or others intended in obtaining a certain objective in a particular business forcibly take over possession of property of such business, establish themselves within the plant, stop its production and refuse access to the workers or to the others desiring to work.⁵⁷

The breakdown of union discipline or the absence of strong organisation was one of the consequences of the sit-in-method. But the causes of its emergence went deeper. The absence of an effective legal remedy or even informal procedure to settle the disputes and the pro-capital policies of the state needed the sit-in-method as an effective counterpoise. The government of Madras deployed the police at the mill sites to maintain 'law and order' and to escort the black-legs to the factories.⁵⁸ In practice, posting of the police always resulted in violent incidents between the striking workmen and the police, and at times, in firings.⁵⁹

A certain amount of organisation was built into the strategy of the sit-in-method. The communists used this method more effectively to organise the Southern Mahratta Railways strike in 1927.⁶⁰ The advantage of the sit-in-method was that even a small group of sit-in-strikers, like that of the committed pickets, would effectively exert pressure on the majority of the workers to down tools. One report noted on the sit-in-activists of the Public Works Department Workshop in 1927:

The majority who are peaceful and want to get on with their work are molested by a small but callous and mischievous minority who on occasions do not hesitate to stoop to any event. The sense of irresponsibility and mischief in the workmen is obvious that everybody who is considered—rightly or wrongly—by their leaders as standing in their way incurs serious personal and bodily risk.⁶¹

In spite of the fact that the sit-in-method was prohibited under the Payment of Wages Act of 1935, the working class continued to indulge in sit-in-method to press their demands. During the Congress Ministry of 1937–39, open confrontations between the police and strikers were frequent

to Madras in the 1937–39 period. See his *Indian Business and Nationalist Politics, 1931–39, The Indigenous Capitalist Class and the Rise of the Congress Party*, Cambridge, 1985, p. 169. But the sit-in-method was highly developed in Madras before the Indian National Congress came to power in Madras and Bombay Presidencies. C. Rajagopalachari condemned this form of strike in strongest terms.

⁵⁷ Ludwig Teller, *The Law Governing*, p. 311.

⁵⁸ E. D. Murphy, *Unions in Conflict: A Comparative Study of Four South Indian Textile Centres, 1918–1939*, Delhi 1980.

⁵⁹ *New India*, 11 December 1920; *Navasakti*, 12 December 1920.

⁶⁰ David Arnold, 'Industrial Violence in Colonial India', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 13 (2), 1980, p. 242.

⁶¹ G.O. 1532, L, 15 July 1927, PW and L, TNA.

and the sit-in strikers were prosecuted.⁶² The police were called in to evict what the management of the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills called the sit-in-strikers 'trespassers' from its premises by force.⁶³ The police opened fire on the peaceful sit-in-strikers within the jute mill premises at Chittivalesa in Guntur district in 1939 inviting the severe criticism even from the Congress leaders themselves.⁶⁴

Slow-Down: Slow-down is defined as a deliberate attempt by workers to reduce output. The cause of slow-down was always difficult to determine. Even a 'trivial' event like the removal of the benches meant for the relaxation of four members in the machine shop of the Burmah Oil Company provoked a slow-down and ultimately led to a general strike in the Company.⁶⁵ Dismissal of a fellow worker caused slow-down in Shree Ganasher Aluminium Company in 1938.⁶⁶ But economic grievances were the underlying causes of the slow-down in most of the firms.⁶⁷

Resolution of industrial conflicts created new norms. As slow-down was considered 'unfair' labour practice, those who indulged in such practice were fined.⁶⁸ The services of only those activists who had caused the sit-in-method were terminated.⁶⁹ The rest of the workers who had gone along with them were reinstated. The continuity of their service was maintained for their welfare benefits,⁷⁰ though they were not paid the wages for the days they were on strike.⁷¹ In some firms, the workers were paid full-day wages, even if they returned to work at mid-day. This 'principle' was followed by the Burmah Oil Company for its employees. Later, this 'principle' was cited as a 'precedent' by the government for its employees in the Public Works Department Workshop.⁷² But the Madras Chamber of Commerce considered such payment 'violation of an important principle' in industrial relations on the ground that such payment would induce the workers to strike on flimsy grounds and return to work without any fear of loss of wages.⁷³ But if there was a lockout, the working class demanded the

⁶² G O 1896, 3 August 1938, Development, TNA

⁶³ V V Giri, *My Life and Times*, Vol. 1, Delhi, 1976, p. 141

⁶⁴ C S. Krishna Murthy, Vice-President of the Port Trust Workers Union, Madras, to C Rajagopalachari, 17 February 1939, in C R File, Reel No. 3, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (hereafter NMML), New Delhi

⁶⁵ G O 1261, L, 9 June 1927, PW and L (Confidential), TNA

⁶⁶ G O 651, 16 March 1939, Development, TNA

⁶⁷ G O 1261, L, 9 June 1927, PW and L (Confidential), TNA

⁶⁸ G O 651, 16 March 1939, Development, TNA

⁶⁹ G O 1117, 29 April 1938, Development, TNA

⁷⁰ E D Murphy, *Unions in Conflict*, p. 74.

⁷¹ Secretary in the PW and L Department to Madras Chamber of Commerce, 4 June 1927, in G O 1532, L 15 July 1927, PW and L, TNA

⁷² Secretary's letter, 13 July 1927, in G O 1532, L 15 July 1927, PW and L, TNA

⁷³ Madras Chamber of Commerce letter, 30 June 1927, in G O 1532, L, 15 July 1927, PW and L, TNA

wages for the lockout period. In fact, the management of the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills granted seven days gratis to the workers during the lockout of 1919.⁷⁴ The right to strike was conceded by the employers who, however, reserved the right to punish those who had struck 'without notice'.⁷⁵

But the employers exercised their prerogative to dismiss the workmen for their 'insubordination' or 'unruly behaviour'. Under common law, even if there was no stipulation as to the length of notice, the contract was terminable by 'reasonable notice'.⁷⁶ The workers came to claim this right through their 'protest' strikes during the Depression.⁷⁷ In fact, the Madras United Spinning and Weaving Mills' management conceded the workers' demand for one month's notice to be given before terminating the workers' services.⁷⁸ This way the settlement of industrial strife contributed to the making of collective contracts.

Sympathetic Strike: A sympathetic strike was one in which the striking employees had no demands of their own, but struck for the purpose of directly or indirectly aiding others who were either locked-out or were on a protracted strike. The workers indulged in three types of sympathetic strikes: (a) political strike; (b) sympathetic strike in firms owned by a single employer; and (c) general strike as token of class solidarity.

Political Strike: The first political strike was that of the Coral Mill workers at Tuticorin in Tamilnadu in April 1908.⁷⁹ The strike was in protest against the arrest of the extremist nationalist leader, V.O. Chidambaram Pillai. To some extent, this political action was motivated by the fact that he was earlier associated with their union and led a strike in February 1908 successfully against the management for a raise in wages. The Coral Mill strike preceded the well-known general strike of the Bombay Cotton mill-hands in July 1908 against the arrest and conviction of Bal Gangadhar Tilak. But this outwardly political strike also had some underlying economic grievances.⁸⁰ In the later period, though the working class participated in the nationalist movement,⁸¹ this form of political strike was conspicuously absent.

⁷⁴ *Swadesamitran*, 17 December 1918.

⁷⁵ Home Poll Deposit, 3 July 1919, File No. 51; August 1919, NAI.

⁷⁶ *A.L.R.* (1918), Calcutta, p. 140.

⁷⁷ G.O. 3536. L, 17 December 1930, PW and L, TNA; G.O. 146, L, 18 January 1933, PW and L, TNA.

⁷⁸ Commissioner of Labour, Letter dated 16 July 1928, in G.O. 120, L, 17 January 1929, PW and L, TNA.

⁷⁹ N. Rajendran, *The National Movement in Tamilnadu, 1905-1914: Agitational Politics and State Coercion*, Madras, 1994, pp. 72-76.

⁸⁰ I.M. Reiser and N.M. Goldberg, eds, *Tilak and the Struggle for Indian Freedom*, Delhi, 1966, pp. 471-544.

⁸¹ *The Mail*, 4 January 1922.

Sympathetic Strike: Sympathetic strike in furtherance of the interests of the locked-out workmen or protracted strikes became an integral part of industrial conflict in the interwar period. In February 1919, the workers of the Burmah Oil Company struck work in sympathy of the 70 Madras harbour workers whose services were terminated by the Burmah Oil Company on the ground that there was no work for them.⁴² The strike in the Buckingham Mill which dragged on for more than two months was brought to an end only when the workers of its sister mill, the Carnatic Mill, went on a sympathetic strike in December 1920.⁴³ The Asiatic Petroleum Company workers extended their solidarity by striking in sympathy of the strikers of the Burmah Oil Company in 1927. This sympathetic action forced the management to concede the demands of the workmen.⁴⁴

But at times the class solidarity of the working class was weakened by the management's policies of concession and discrimination. When the Buckingham Mill workers decided to go on a sympathetic strike in favour of the Carnatic mill-hands in 1921, one section of the workforce—the Adi-Dravidas—stayed away from the strike action, induced by the management's concessions defeating the class action of the working class.⁴⁵

General Strike: A general strike, involving workers in all or most of the trades, was the 'ultimate weapon'. As skilful negotiators and organisers of the strikes, the communist sought to intensify class conflict by means of a general strike.⁴⁶ Their control over workers in the strategic plants like the oil companies and railway workshops, and later tramways, gave them leverage to force the employers and the government to resolve the disputes. The political ramifications of a sympathetic general strike in Madras were recognised by the government. The government was apprehensive of the spread of strikes from one plant to another as part of a communist's conspiracy; in particular an imminent spread of a strike to the Perambur Railway workshops from the Burmah Oil Company where the communists like Singaravelu Chetti were conducting the strike in 1927 was viewed 'gravely' from the point of view of 'law and order'.⁴⁷

As leftist influence increased in trade union circles in the mid-1920s, the government became more apprehensive of the tactics and strategies followed

⁴² Home Poll Deposit, File No. 16, March 1919, NAL.

⁴³ *New India*, 21 January 1921; Home Poll Deposit, 24 January 1921, File No. 41, April 1921, NAL.

⁴⁴ Labour Commissioner's Report, 9 May 1927, in G.O. 1216, L, 9 June 1927, PW and L (Confidential), TNA.

⁴⁵ Home Poll Deposit, Part I, File No. 93/1/1921, NAL; *Swadesamitran*, 2, 5, 6 and 7 July 1921.

⁴⁶ The note of the Secretary dated 15 May 1927, in the PW and L Department on the Communist's Strategies in G.O. 1261, L, 9 June 1927 (Confidential), PW and L, TNA.

⁴⁷ Labour Commissioner's Report, 9 May 1927 in G.O. 1261, L, 9 June 1927 (Confidential), PW and L, TNA.

by the communists. The propaganda at the strike meetings united and consolidated the organisations of the strikers and created sympathy among the public at large. One report noted on the leaders who organised the Burmah Oil Company strike in 1927:

Public opinion rather public passion is very easily influenced . . . [by propaganda]. The great mass of feeling is in favour of the strikers and against the employers with whom are now associated the government on the score of indifference and inaction followed by a manager and futile magisterial enquiry.⁸⁸

The government and the Employers Federation of Southern India, a body of predominantly European interests,⁸⁹ questioned the legality of sympathetic strike or call to sympathetic action. On official noted: 'The incitement to sympathetic strike and appeal to foreign labour support are acts . . . subversive of law and order'.⁹⁰ Of course, the immunity provision in the Trade Unions Act of 1926 was only in pursuance of a genuine dispute with regard to particular trades and did not legalise either a general strike or a sympathetic strike. Therefore, Slater, Secretary in the Public Works Department suggested that 'there is no question that as the law stands in India at the present day, the attempt of the leaders to spread industrial disaffection makes them liable to criminal prosecution'.⁹¹ Yet, the imminent threat of a general strike forced an otherwise indifferent government to intervene and settle the disputes. The negotiation of new agreements after the Burmah Oil Company strike carried a condition, as the Commissioner of Labour noted, that:

The men were clearly made to understand that the company has undisputed right to determine what staff is surplus and to take what steps they consider necessary to adjust the position. It was also impressed on the men that the installation manager's authority must be supreme and that they should guarantee to carry out his instructions without questions.⁹²

The incorporation of this 'right' into the written agreement did not mean the establishment of an employer's undisputed 'authority' over the workmen; it was an agreement of contract subject to modification by the process

⁸⁸ Secretary's note, 15 May 1927 in G.O. 1261, L, 9 June 1927 (Confidential), PW and L, TNA.

⁸⁹ *Almanak and Directory of Madras and Southern India*, Madras, 1936.

⁹⁰ Secretary's note in G.O. 1261, L, 9 June 1927 (Confidential), TNA.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Labour Commissioner's letter in G.O. 1261, L, 9 June 1927 (Confidential), PW and L, TNA.

of negotiation or concerted action.⁹³ Thus, the strategies of sympathetic strikes and sit-down methods were forged in relation to the employer's and the government's policies at the level of individual plants.

IV

Conflicts of Rights

In the contractual relations of an employer with his employees, the employer's right to control the method of doing the work and the employer's right of suspension or dismissal were often emphasised and were incorporated into collective agreements. But this right of the employer was not uncontested. In the early years of the twentieth century, an act of 'insubordination' included the collective action of the working class and was put down by the government and the employers with a heavy hand.⁹⁴

Studies on Bombay's working class show that in spite of the fact that employment in the cotton mills was extremely insecure, the mill-hands scarcely ever struck in support of the workman who had been dismissed. Since hiring and firing was done by the jobbers, the tensions created by dismissals were resolved within the jobbers groups themselves instead of being regarded as an issue between the management and labour.⁹⁵ But the dismissal of the officials of the union dominated by the Girni Kamgar Union caused the union militancy and led to the general strike of 1929. This was considered a sign of advance towards class consciousness.⁹⁶

Contrary to this development in Bombay, class consciousness marked the collective action of the working classes in Madras as early as 1913.⁹⁷ In the post-war inflationary period, when there was insecurity of employment, strikes against dismissals became part of the concerted industrial action. The absence of the jobbers in Madras and the direct supervision by the European masters over the workmen further exacerbated the tensions at the workplace. To cite a few cases: (a) the employees of the Madras Corporation Workshop struck in March 1919, in protest against the suspension of some maistries for their alleged failure to give information as to the cause of the damage done to the mould,⁹⁸ (b) the workers of the Christian Literary Society, a publishing company, downed tools when a compositor was dismissed from his service for his refusal to do the work of

⁹³ Home Poll Deposit, File No. 42, April 1921, NAI, G.O. 2684, 20 September 1929, PW and L, TNA.

⁹⁴ G.O. 499, Public, 8 June 1904, TNA.

⁹⁵ Richard Newmen, *Workers and Unions in Bombay: A Study of Organisation in the Cotton Mills*, Canberra, 1981, p. 66

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 66

⁹⁷ *Bombay Chronicle*, 29 December 1913.

⁹⁸ Home Poll Deposit, File No. 49, 2 April 1919, NAI.

an absent wheeler,⁹⁹ and (c) when the Addisons Company management dismissed the foreman of the press, who was involved in the formation of a union, the workers struck.¹⁰⁰

In the case of (a), the employer had the prerogative to dismiss the workmen at common law, if they refused to give vital information as to the cause of the damage; in (b), the refusal of the compositor to do the work of an absent wheeler reflects conflicts of rights between the management's prerogative to reorganise work and employee's refusal to do the work lower than his grade;¹⁰¹ and in (c), in the absence of the trade union law, the employer exercised his prerogative to dismiss a union activist. In all these cases, the workers gave in after a few days of struggle, but the readiness with which the workers struck in support of their dismissed workmen shows the political consciousness of the working class.

Principle of Seniority: The most protracted struggle over conflicts of rights were in the European-owned companies where the employers had resisted the organisation of workers by union leaders. One way to fight against workers' combination was to victimise the active trade unionists by denying them promotion to a higher position. On significant strike in the Buckingham Mill which had lasted for more than one month in 1920 was because of the denial of promotion to one jobber.

The European weaving master preferred two acting side-jobbers for promotion, but they refused it on the ground that the injustice was done to their senior. Dismissals followed for their insubordination.¹⁰² On 14 October 1920, eight more workers were dismissed for their refusal to accept the post of a head-jobber. These events finally led to a general strike in the Buckingham Mill.¹⁰³ While, for the management, the question of promotion was a matter of 'prerogative', the workers viewed it as a matter of right that seniors should be considered for the promotion.¹⁰⁴ Of course, this was not conceded by the management. In fact, the workers admitted the right of the company to 'appoint, promote and dismiss them at their discretion'.¹⁰⁵ Even in case of retrenchment, the workers demanded the principle of seniority to be followed. The Madras Port Trust workers protested in 1932 that no definite principle was adopted in retrenching workers and that 'no seniority of service was observed' and gave 'concrete instances of glaring injustice'. The workers demanded the government's intervention to rectify the 'injustice'.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁹ Home Poll Deposit, File No. 50, 20 June 1919, NAI.

¹⁰⁰ Home Poll Deposit, File No. 51, 3 July 1919, NAI.

¹⁰¹ File No. 878, L, 1 and L, NAI.

¹⁰² *New India*, 27 October 1920.

¹⁰³ E. D. Murphy, *Unions in Conflict*, p. 74.

¹⁰⁴ Home Poll Deposit, File No. 70, September 1920, NAI, *Swadesamitran*, 26 May 1920.

¹⁰⁵ Home Poll Deposit, File No. 42, April 1921, NAI.

¹⁰⁶ G.O. 1620, L, 1 August 1932, PW and L, TNA.

The Right to Negotiation: In European firms, there was a deep-seated hostility to trade unions run by 'outsiders', a euphemism for trade union leaders. As trade unions were first formed in the 'white capital' firms in the immediate post-war period and as their combinations coincided with the Non-Cooperation Movement against the colonial state, the state and the employers came to suspect the combinations established for 'sinister' purposes, rather than for the advancement of the workers' interest.¹⁰⁷ The formation of the unions was considered unlawful since they interfered with the freedom of trade.¹⁰⁸ In the absence of any statutory provision for trade unions, the collective action of the working class focused on the right to association and negotiation through trade unions. Industrial conflicts were protracted, primarily because, as one report noted:

So long as outside agitators take an active part in the proceedings, the employers will have nothing to do with the men's unions while the men have shown no disposition to cut themselves loose from the agitators.¹⁰⁹

It was only when the 'outsiders' were removed from the unions that the disputes were resolved and settlement arrived at.¹¹⁰

The right to negotiate through trade unions at times overshadowed their initial economic demands.¹¹¹ Though a large number of trade unions were registered under the Trade Unions Act of 1926, recognition was not given to them by the employers. Strike in the Burmah Oil Company in 1927 continued for more than 28 days primarily because of the 'insistence on the part of the workmen to get their joint representation made through the union', which was dominated by the communists.¹¹² This insistence was matched by the management's persistent demand that 'only actual employees of the installation should discuss their grievances with them and that they could not recognise the union or have any connection with it.'¹¹³ However, Indian employers, such as the management of the Madras United Spinning and Weaving Mills, recognised trade unions as bargaining agents.¹¹⁴

In the Depression, when the bargaining power of trade unions was weak, some European employers were prepared to give conditional recognition to registered trade unions.¹¹⁵ The Buckingham and Carnatic Mills management also accorded the Madras Labour Union a recognition which

¹⁰⁷ Home Poll Deposit, File No. 29, March 1919, NAI.

¹⁰⁸ *New India*, 18 November 1920.

¹⁰⁹ Home Poll Deposit, File No. 105, July 1920, NAI.

¹¹⁰ *Swadesamitran*, 26 May 1920.

¹¹¹ G.O. 1261, L, 9 June 1927, PW and L (Confidential), TNA.

¹¹² Labour Commissioner's Report, 29 April 1927 in G.O. 1261, L, 9 June 1927, PW and L (Confidential), TNA.

¹¹³ G.O. 1261, L, 9 June 1927, PW and L, TNA.

¹¹⁴ G.O. 1366 (LS), 1 May 1930 (Confidential), PW and L, TNA.

¹¹⁵ G.O. 50, L, 6 January 1933, PW and L, TNA; File No. 876 (16) of 1930, I and L, NAI.

meant nothing in terms of the functioning of trade unions. One of the conditions for 'recognition' was:

Recognition of the MLU for textile workers by Messrs Binny and Company will in no way be regarded as being in substitution of any other channels of communication between the workers and Messrs Binny and Co. and will in no way prejudice or affect the existing rights and privileges of the work people of the B and C mills to make direct representations on any subject either to the management through the mill officers or through any other channel or direct to Messrs Binny and Co.¹¹⁶

This conditional recognition circumvented the Trade Unions Act of 1926. In times of industrial conflicts, the management of the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills never initiated direct negotiation with the President of the Madras Labour Union and exchanged only letters with him on the question of reinstatement of the dismissed workers in 1938.¹¹⁷ The absence of compulsory provisions in the Trade Unions Act of 1926 strengthened the power of the employers vis-à-vis trade unions. Being aware of this defect, the working class demanded a legislation similar to the Wagner Act in USA for a compulsory union recognition by the employers.¹¹⁸

The Right to Association: In spite of the fact that the Madras High Court issued an injunction against the Madras Labour Union, the workers continued to have a faith in the 'potentialities' of their Union and attributed every gain they obtained to their union power.¹¹⁹ A unique trial of strength over the right to association was fought in the tramway company. The European management of the company dismissed the five office-bearers of the Madras Tramways and Electric Supply Workers Association for what it called 'misconduct'. But the workers viewed it as 'victimisation' for their union activities.¹²⁰

Having failed to persuade the Minister for Labour, V.V. Giri, himself once trade union leader, to institute a court of enquiry, the communist-controlled union decided by a ballot of 1,484 against five to go on strike, and sent a strike notice to the government.¹²¹ But the Congress government issued a communique in which it disapproved of the strike notice and noted

¹¹⁶ Binny and Co Mills' letter to the President, Madras Labour Union, 10 February 1938, in *G. Selverpathy Chetty Papers*, NMML.

¹¹⁷ See the correspondences in G.O. 1117, 29 April 1938, Development, TNA.

¹¹⁸ G.O. 1378, 18 June 1937, Development, TNA.

¹¹⁹ Home Poll Deposit, Part 1, File No 93/1/1921, NAI.

¹²⁰ G.O. 1278, L, 19 May 1938, Development, TNA.

¹²¹ *The Commissioner of Police Report*, 14 March 1938, in G.O. 1289, L, 19 May 1938, Development, TNA.

that 'the omission to reinstate a few persons cannot be a justification for disorganising a public utility services even for a day'.¹²² To this, the Union replied:

The issue is not the omission to reinstate a few persons. It is one of deliberate victimisation of important office-bearers of the worker's organisation for their trade union activities. No trade union can function if its office-bearers and members are to be thus allowed to be victimised for their legitimate trade union activities. The issue, thus, is clearly one involving a most fundamental and vital principle, viz., the right of any trade union to function without let or hindrance by the employer.¹²³

This determined stand forced the government of C. Rajagopalachari to institute a one-man court of arbitration under Justice V. Pandurang Rao of the Madras High Court. The terms of reference of the court covered specifically 'whether victimisation occurred for union activities and the strike of 1937 or whether reinstatement was refused due to the unsatisfactory performance of their duties which includes conduct'.¹²⁴ This was the first time in colonial India that the court of arbitration was constituted to enquire into the charges of 'victimisation'.

In its 20-page report, the court of arbitration confirmed the charges of victimisation and indicated one Indian traffic superintendent as responsible for victimising union activists. The Judge also did not agree with the view of Grant, a European manager, that Burkinshaw, the Managing Agent, 'was free to dismiss the workmen', even though he did not do so, due to 'the changed political conditions'. The Judge clarified that 'the changed political conditions [the change of government under the Congress] cannot have extinguished that right' since there was 'no change in the law which defines the rights of individual citizens'.¹²⁵

This award was immediately implemented. All the fines imposed on the workers after the 1937 strike were cancelled. The five dismissed workers were reinstated with pay even for the days they were not in service.¹²⁶ The working class hailed this award as a national victory at their meeting in Madras.

¹²² The Government's press communique, 9 April 1938, in G.O. 1289, L, 19 May 1938, Development, TNA

¹²³ The workers union's letter, 11 March 1938, in G.O. 1289, L, 19 May 1938, Development, TNA.

¹²⁴ The government order appointing a court of arbitration, 3 May 1938, in G.O. 1289, L, 19 May 1938, Development, TNA

¹²⁵ The award of Justice Pandurang Rao, in G.O. 1289, L, 19 May 1938, Development, TNA.

¹²⁶ The management's acceptance of the award and the concessions granted to the workers made C. Rajagopalachari to call Burkinshaw 'extraordinary' man. See his note in G.O. 1289, L, 19 May 1938, Development, TNA.

Dismissal for Insubordination: A subtle distinction existed between dismissal for insubordination and victimisation for union activities. Words like 'unruly behaviour', 'ringleaders', 'riotous' workers were used to describe trade union leaders and strike activists within the firms. In European firms, the ringleaders included even Chakkarai Chetty, a nationalist leader for organising the strike in the Burmah Oil Company in 1927.¹²⁷ In European units, the 'unruly' behaviour included the assault on weaving masters,¹²⁸ and a form of a sit-in-strike (called *satyagraha* by some European employers).¹²⁹ But such acts were always provoked by European masters,¹³⁰ or employer's refusal to deal with the workers' grievances.

Contrary to the militancy of sit-in-strikers in the USA in the 1930s, sit-in strike in Madras assumed the form of *satyagraha* which caused no damage to the machines or individuals.¹³¹ Yet, the punishment of sit-in-strikers for their 'insubordination', differed from firm to firm. The sit-in activists in the Public Works Department Workshops in 1927 were re-engaged though they lost their wages for the days they were on strike;¹³² similarly the sit-in-strikers in the Burmah Oil Company were re-employed in 1920.¹³³ The lenient treatment of the sit-in activists in these units owed to the strategic position, in particular, of the Burmah Oil Company employees and the consolidation of the working class by strong trade union leadership.

But in the case of the textile units, bargaining power of the workers remained low, and their power rose only in times of the boom. The employers used this as leverage to dismiss the 'riotous' workers and attempted to replace them with new hands.¹³⁴ The dismissal of the 'riotous' workers remained the prerogative of the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills Management which contended, in the face of a strong union opposition, in a letter to the government in 1938, that:

We cannot, whatever may be the findings of a third party, retract from the position we have adopted of insisting on our right to dismiss any employee who fails to do satisfactory service, more particularly those who have refused to work, who are guilty of rioting in the mill or other serious acts of insubordination. This we hold is a question which in no way concerns the trade unions and we, therefore consider they have no cause to ask that the matter be referred to any conciliation Board.¹³⁵

¹²⁷ G.O. 1261, L, 9 June 1927, PW and L, TNA.

¹²⁸ *Swadesamitran*, 13 and 16 December 1918.

¹²⁹ *Almanak and Directory*, pp. 11-12.

¹³⁰ Home Poll Deposit, File No. 26, 2 November 1920, December 1920, NAI.

¹³¹ G.O. 1532, L, 15 July 1927, PW and L, TNA.

¹³² G.O. 1261, L, 9 July 1927 (Confidential), PW and L, TNA.

¹³³ Home Poll Deposit, File No. 84, December 1920, NAI.

¹³⁴ Binny and Co. Mills' letter, 4 March 1938, to Madras Labour Union, in G.O. 1117, 29 April 1938, Development, TNA.

¹³⁵ Binny and Co. Mills' letter dated 1 April 1938, to Secretary to Development Department, Government of Madras, in G.O. 1117, 29 April 1938, Development, TNA.

Given the fact that the contracts of employment at this period were not specially enforceable at law, dismissal, however wrongful, was made effective by the lack of fair procedure and the absence of rights of self-defence. The management's power was further strengthened by the absence of statutory provisions in the Trade Disputes Act of 1929 compelling the management to refer the disputes to boards of conciliation and courts of enquiry.¹³⁶ It was under these circumstances of an employer's intransigence and hostility that industrial action turned into what is called, in another context, 'collective bargaining by riot'.¹³⁷

V

Industrial Violence

The dismissal of the 'riotous' workers was followed by the recruitment of the black-legs even in the face of a strong resistance from the working class. The power of the employer to recruit black-legs was implicitly recognised under the common law employment contract. But this coercive strategy of the management provoked violent reactions among the working class against the management, black-legs and the police. Failing to recognise this aspect of the common law employment contract, some 'subaltern' scholars have argued that in a traditional society like India, the workers drawn from various castes/communities retained their 'primordial' identities and these in times of heightened conflicts reacted adversely on the class formation and solidarity of the working class.¹³⁸ This 'subaltern' perspective underestimates the power of an employer in manipulating caste/community differences among the working class.

In the serious manifestation of communal disharmony among the millhands of the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills in 1921, the advice and the pressure of the Labour Board and the outside caste leaders played a significant part.¹³⁹ Much more significant was the liberal opinion which underlay the ideological premise of the common law employment contract. The employment of Adi-Dravidas was justified in terms of their 'right' to work.¹⁴⁰ This right, though rooted in the English experience of industrial conflict,¹⁴¹ meant the opening up of cleavages in the Indian working class

¹³⁶ *The Indian Express*, 25 March 1938.

¹³⁷ E.J. Hobsbawm, 'Collective Bargaining by Riot', in *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour*, London, 1964, p. 7.

¹³⁸ Depesh Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working Class*, pp. 155-85.

¹³⁹ *Swadesamitran*, 19 April 1920.

¹⁴⁰ Gilbert Slater's speech, *Proceedings of the Madras Legislative Council*, second session, Vol. III, October-November 1921, p. 102.

¹⁴¹ John Saville, 'Trade Unions and Free Labour: The Background to the Taffvale Decision', in Asa Briggs and John Saville, eds, *Essays in Labour History*, London, 1964, pp. 317-50.

composed of different castes and communities. At one level, the colonial government refused to accord any recognition to community or religious based trade unions,¹⁴² but at another level, it extended police support to the employers to recruit and employ one community as strike breakers. The right of the employer to employ black-legs and that of the black-legs to work were protected effectively by the police personnel. The Ayling Committee which was constituted to go into the 1921 industrial disturbances in Madras noted that:

We think that the posting of the police along the roads by which the Adi-Dravidas passed to work at the mills was a perfectly proper measure intended and calculated simply to keep the peace.¹⁴³

Yet, much of industrial violence was due to the confrontation between the police and the strikers on the one hand, and black-legs and the strikers on the other. These acts were described in government reports as 'incendiarism', 'affray' and 'assaults'.¹⁴⁴

Industrial violence manifested itself in the form of collective violence and assault against those who had supported the employers. When the Burmah Oil Company workers went on strike and picketed the installations in 1920, some Pathans recruited from Bombay came into clash with the strikers. On 17 May 1920, the altercations between them and the 'local coolies' resulted in a 'riot'. The police intervened and resorted to firing to quell the 'riot'. One Pathan was killed and many others were injured.¹⁴⁵

In September 1920, industrial conflict at the same installations developed into open confrontation between the strikers and the police. The police had faced 'some difficulty in maintaining order and keeping within the bounds of the law the daily processions organised by the men, but they displayed commendable amount of tact and forbearance'. However, their tact and forbearance could not prevent them from coming into clash with 'a mob that was storming the installations'.¹⁴⁶

The maintenance of law and order also included the escorting of the black-legs to the mills. On 9 December 1920, when the strikers of the Buckingham Mill were picketing the mill, the police along with the coolies from the Madras Harbour arrived in a lorry. The workers on both sides of the Perambur barracks near the mills hurled stones at the police and the black-legs as the vehicle overheated and stopped. 'In self-defence', without any warning or use of the lathi charge prior to firing, the police opened fire killing two and injuring many others.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² File No. 1755 (6) of 1932, L, I and L, NAI.

¹⁴³ G O 671, 7 October 1921, Public, TNA, p. 4.

¹⁴⁴ Home Poll Deposit, Part I, File No. 93/1/1921, NAI.

¹⁴⁵ Home Poll Deposit, June 1920, File No. 95, NAI.

¹⁴⁶ Home Poll Deposit, 17 September 1920, File No. 70, NAI.

¹⁴⁷ *Svadesamitran*, 10, 11 and 12 December 1920.

In 1921, when the conflict between the strike-breaking Adi-Dravidas and the high-caste Hindu workers took an increasingly communal colour, the police bore the brunt of working-class violence. For example, on 2 July 1921, when the police personnel were engaged in the combing operations at the disturbed mill areas, two shots were fired from the dark, one shot hitting a constable in the stomach and the other injuring the leg of another constable; the person injured in the stomach subsequently died in hospital.¹⁴⁸

The police had to use bayonet charges to disburse the 'menacing' crowd. Country-made bombs were thrown by the strikers at the Adi-Dravida workers going from the mills for mid-day meal. On 6 October 1921, several bombs were hurled at the police who opened fire, killing one and injuring eight strikers.

In times of heightened conflict, there was nothing communal or pre-capitalist about industrial violence. It cut across caste/communal barriers. On 3 July 1921, the Muslim driver of the manager of the Buckingham Mill was chased by his own community members from the manager's compound to his verandah where his three toes were cut off and his fingers injured. 'A police officer discovered him walking in a dazed condition'. The Hindu and the Muslim workers wounded severely the Anglo-Indian foreman of the Buckingham Mill.¹⁴⁹

Industrial violence was a discriminatory act of assault on those who attempted to weaken the collective action of the strikers. This was not due to the importation of the rural culture into the industrial arena, as some 'subaltern' scholars argue.¹⁵⁰ Industrial violence was the specific outcome of the city worker's logic of collective action in an industrial atmosphere which did not allow collective bargaining to develop between 'white capital'¹⁵¹ and indigenous labour.

With the growth of trade union on firmer basis, industrial violence was replaced by collective acts of picketing. To strengthen and intensify workers' industrial action, pickets visited the working-class neighbourhood and organised the workers.¹⁵² This mobilisation in the working-class neighbourhood was considered an act of 'intimidatory' tactics by the European employers. They appealed to the government to restrict picketing by an Act similar to the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act of 1875 in Britain.¹⁵³ Even though picketing was not prohibited under any legislation,

¹⁴⁸ Home Poll Deposit, Part 1, File No. 93/1/1921, NAL.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ David Arnold, 'Industrial Violence', pp. 243-44.

¹⁵¹ The quoted words were used by one of the officials to indicate the intention of the union leaders to organise workers only in European-owned units. See Home Poll Deposit, Part 1, File No. 93/1/1921, NAL.

¹⁵² M and SM Railways' letter, 19 April 1933, in G.O. 2480, L, 14 November 1933, PW and L, TNA.

¹⁵³ G.O. 1097, 26 April 1938, Development, TNA.

the colonial courts construed the holdings of demonstrations as intended to 'terrorise' the workmen and 'disorganise' the business.¹⁵⁴ The management of the Southern and Mahratta Railway appealed to the Madras High Court to punish a group of workers who obstructed the railway line in 1927 strike under Section 149 of the Indian Penal Code, but the court held in *Vasudeva Mudaliar and other vs Emperor* that the 'offences', such as stone-throwing were punishable only under Sections 127 and 128 of the Railways Act.¹⁵⁵

Despite that, picketing became an organised form of industrial action under the communists. Workmen picketed at the printing units in the 1937-39 period,¹⁵⁶ effectively acted in concert against the employers, courted arrest, refused to pay fine in the courtroom and suffered terms of imprisonment for causing 'nuisance to the public'.¹⁵⁷ Such industrial conflicts no longer remained a trial of economic strength between the employers and the workers, but soon became a symbol of revolt against the colonial law and the Congress ministry.

In some other units, trade unions opposed the employment of black-legs. The workers union of the Western India Match Factory, Madras, demanded the management to honour an 'understanding' reached between V.V. Giri and the management that one black-leg be removed from the factory.¹⁵⁸ The union wrote to this worker, when he pleaded with it to forget his past acts, as follows:

You were sent away from the factory by management themselves on account of your behaviour towards the workers. You were brought back during the strike. You acted as a black-leg. If you are socially boycotted, you deserve it for having acted as a black-leg during the strike.¹⁵⁹

The black-leg was removed to a different place of employment. This resistance to the employment of black-leg in the factory reveals the forging of solidarity in relation to the employer's policies.

Much of industrial violence and militancy of the working class in Madras in the interwar period was due to the fact that they depended on their factory employment as the main source of livelihood, while in other regions retreat to the village and reliance on village resources to hold out against

¹⁵⁴ *Dalmia Cement Limited vs Narain Dass Anandji Bechar*, quoted in Arjun P. Aggarwal, *Indian and American Labour*, p. 12; G.O. 1896, 3 August 1938, Development, TNA.

¹⁵⁵ A.I.R. 1929, Madras, p. 880.

¹⁵⁶ K. Murugesan, 'Comrade Ghate's Four Fruitful Years in Madras', *S.V. Ghate: Our First General Secretary*, Delhi, 1971, pp. 81-82.

¹⁵⁷ *Swadesamitran*, 28 June 1938, G.O. 4225, 1 September 1938, Home (Confidential), TNA.

¹⁵⁸ G.O. 1859 (173-176), 30 July 1938, Development, TNA.

¹⁵⁹ The workers' union letter, 19 August 1938, to Nambiar, in G.O. 1859 (173-176), 30 July 1938, Development, TNA.

recalcitrant employers were important weapons in the struggle of factory labour.¹⁶⁰

Given this reality of the workers' dependence on factory employment alone, industrial conflict often turned into industrial violence as the workers ran out of their resources and used desperate means to force the employers to resolve the disputes. The use of police force and imposition of prohibitory orders against the trade union leaders further exacerbated the tensions at the workplace. Nevertheless, the concerted action of the working class recast the relation of the workers to their employers by substituting collective bargaining for individual bargaining in the colonial period.

Conclusion

Contrary to the stereotypes in subaltern labour historiography that the pre-capitalist relations marked the relations between the employer and his employees in colonial India, historical examination of industrial conflict reveals distinct features of the common law employment contract which bound the employee to his employer individually. Under this law, the employer had unlimited power to regulate his workmen's employment such as the right of selection, the character of the task and even the power of dismissal. But this power of the employer did not go uncontested. In fact, industrial conflict in colonial Madras city was not only over the relation between productivity and the wage, but it was also over demands for a greater say in managerial decisions such as control of work at the workplace.

The workers conducted three distinct, yet interrelated strategies of struggle: sit-down, slow-down and sympathetic strikes. These forms of strikes were considered unlawful by employers and the government. But these strategies were forged in relation to the employer's policies.

One of the distinct features of the strike was that they were organised not only for economic demands such as a wage rise, but also for political 'rights' such as the right of association, the principle of seniority and the reinstatement of the dismissed workers. These questions were referred to the courts of enquiry and boards of conciliation under the Indian Trade Disputes Act of 1929 and were resolved in collective agreements. These provided for rates of pay, holidays, gratuity or provident fund schemes and other fringe benefits, and in the case of women employees, maternity benefits. The collective agreements also embodied the rights and obligations of the workers as well as of the employers. The collective agreements were negotiated by trade unions as working-class agents, strengthening the

¹⁶⁰ Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *The Origins of Industrial Capitalism in India: The Business Strategies and the Working Classes in Bombay 1900-1940*, Cambridge, 1994, p. 166.

contractual relation of the employer to his employees. This was the first stage in the substitution of collective agreements for individual contracts. Collective bargaining as it developed in the interwar period in Madras displaced the individual contract of master and servant and substituted in its place the collective agreement on status of security of employment.

The English doctor in Sri Lanka

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Sri Lanka is heir to both traditional medicine and the modern healing art of allopathy, 'the art of the English doctor'. In addition, there are the peripheral systems ranging from homoeopathy to Reflexology.

Traditional medicine goes back nearly 2,000 years, with a tripartite division into the Ayurveda, Siddha and Unani modes. Ayurveda was brought from India to Sri Lanka. It has a stepped down version, styled 'desika sihicha' meaning 'national curative system' in the Sinhala language. The bases of Ayurveda are the ancient Indian texts written in Sanskrit. Siddha is a South Indian (Tamil-based) modification of Ayurveda. The ancestry of Unani is quite different. It derives from the Graeco-Arab medicine of the Middle East. These three traditional therapies are specific to the three communities in Sri Lanka. Ayurveda, Siddha and Unani appertain to the Sinhala, the Tamil and the Muslim communities, respectively.¹ Even today, traditional medicine is the bedrock on which the work of the 'English doctor' is seen as a recent stratum.

It is in this context that the institution of the 'English doctor' evolved in Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka, the term 'English' is the preferred synonym for 'British', the latter work, for phonological reasons, sounding uncouth to Sri Lankan ears.

The British connection with Ceylon, as Sri Lanka was called till 1972 when it became a republic, lasted from 1796, when the British ousted the Dutch to 1948 when it became independent.

¹ According to the 1981 Census, the principal communities of Sri Lanka and their percentages to total population are: Sinhalese 73.98 per cent; Ceylon Tamils 12.60 per cent; Indian Tamils 5.56 per cent; Ceylon Moors 7.12 per cent; Burghers 0.26 per cent; Malays 0.29 per cent. Cf. *Statistical Pocketbook of Sri Lanka*, Colombo, 1982, p. 14. The total population in 1982 was 14,860,000. In this article, the terms 'Ceylon' and 'Sri Lanka' are used according to context. Ceylon Moors and Malays are Muslims.

So, the term 'English doctor' is a flexible term of art. At first, it stood for the doctor, British by race, who practised allopathy, whether in the military or civil arena, in Ceylon. Soon afterwards, some of the Burghers, the descendants of the Dutch, were also taken into this charmed circle. Later, towards the end of the nineteenth century, the institution of the 'English doctor' became the badge and symbol of the affluent indigenous Sri Lankans, medically inclined and welfare-oriented. Still later, it became a prestigious profession for the Ceylonese middle class. When Ceylon introduced free education from the kindergarten to the university in 1944, some of the clever children of the urban poor, too, became 'English doctors'.

Essentially, then, the 'English doctor' was a Britisher who had professionally qualified himself in an allopathic medical school, and later, a Sri Lankan who had done so. That was how one became an English doctor through achievement. There were others on whom this honour was thrust. One such medical person was the RMP (Registered Medical Practitioner) of whom a well-known Sri Lankan surgeon, Dr Lucian de Zilwa (1875–1969) could write, dryly,

having qualified as an apothecary and worked for some years as dispenser, he had been, owing to the scarcity of qualified practitioners, put in charge of rural dispensaries as apothecary-in-charge, with the right of examining and treating patients. They were registered as medical practitioners, and were called doctors.²

Apparently, the RMP had the touch of a bounder about him.

The aim of this article is to assess the status and role of the 'English doctor' as a class in the historical continuum and to see how this institution has shaped and, in turn, has been shaped by, the social history of medicine in Sri Lanka. Underlying this core-concern are the sub-concepts of the evolving attitudes of the 'English doctor' towards traditional therapy, the ascription of diseases and changes in the Bedside Manner.

The Original 'English Doctor' and his Ruling Ideas

When the British annexed the indigenous kingdom of Kandy in 1815, they ruled over two kinds of territories: the Maritime Provinces, under European control since 1505, and the newly conquered Kandy. In both these territories, the traditional therapies of Ayurveda, Siddha and Unani were prevalent, as indeed is generally true today.

The British 'English doctor' arrived in Ceylon as part of the British pacification process. He served both the military and the civil side of the British establishment. Naturally, he shared the ruling ideas of his race and class. British arms were supreme in the Indian subcontinent proving that

² Lucian de Zilwa, *Scenes of a Life Time: An Autobiography*, Colombo, 1967, p. 141

indigenous military prowess did not work. Such effortless superiority was not to be assigned to British medicine. Asian medicine did work and sometimes, amazingly. The British 'English doctor' had to come to terms intellectually with that ground reality.³

The British civilian or non-medical army officer accepted this situation. Major Jonathan Forbes, of the 78th Highlanders and later a Government Agent (head of province), described how swiftly and effectively a 'native' doctor set aright a dislocated ankle of a villager.⁴ Captain Robert Percival, of the 19th Foot, wrote of 'the very simple cures' of the traditional therapist.⁵ Yet, both agreed that traditional therapy had much to learn from western medicine, Percival arguing that cow-pox vaccination should be introduced to Ceylon.⁶

The intellectual responses of the British 'English doctor' were of two kinds. The less doctrinaire were willing to concede some assumptions of the traditional therapists. For instance, Dr Thomas Christie (then equal in status to Principal Medical Officer) observed that changes in the moon's course affected the virulence of diseases such as 'miasmata' (the then undiagnosed malaria).⁷ As a rule, however, the less theoretical among the British 'English doctors' emphasised the social aspects of allopathy. They used to great effect the science of statistics then known as 'political arithmetic', a field that did not interest the traditional physician.

Christie, himself, studied the morbidity of the Army units stationed in Ceylon, such as the 19th, the 51st, the 65th and the Malay Regiments and detachments of the Bengal and the Madras Artillery. In his reports, Christie noted the prevalence of miasmata as an environmental disease.⁸ He observed some incidents of tropical clinical medicine, such as that while mercury cured beri-beri, it brought on fevers which proved fatal.⁹ Perhaps this is an early recorded instance of iatrogenic disease.

Other British 'English doctors' stressed the effects of tropical morbidity on military personnel. For instance, Dr Henry Marshall who served in Ceylon till 1821 and later rose to the post of Inspector General of Army Hospitals in Britain, wrote on the high military morbidity in Ceylon and linked it to climatic conditions.¹⁰

³ A few among the British officials were sympathetic to the cultures of the indigenous peoples of Ceylon. For instance, Sir Alexander Johnston, Chief Justice, was instrumental in having the Muhammadan Code (of law) approved by the Governor-in-Council in 1806.

⁴ Major J. Forbes, *Eleven Years in Ceylon*, London, 1972 rpt, p. 24.

⁵ Capt Robert Percival, *An Account of the Island of Ceylon*, 1803, London, 1972 rpt, p. 183.

⁶ Percival, *An Account of the Island of Ceylon*, p. 184.

⁷ Dr Thomas Christie, *Reports on the Morbidity of Army Units Stationed in Ceylon*, in James Cordiner, *A Description of Ceylon*, 1807, Dehiwela, 1983 rpt, p. 443.

⁸ Christie, *Reports*, pp. 438-53.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 442.

¹⁰ Henry Marshall, M.D., *Ceylon: A General Description of the Island and of Its Inhabitants*, 1846, Dehiwela, 1969 rpt, p. 32.

On the other hand, the doctrinaire British 'English doctors' set their face against traditional therapy, just as later Lord Macaulay and his like-minded colleagues were disdainful of Indian culture and law. Pre-eminent among them was John Davy, MD, FRS. The younger brother of Sir Humphrey Davy, John Davy, was in Ceylon from 1817 to 1819, as Army surgeon and physician-in-attendance of Sir Robert Browning, Governor of Ceylon. A percipient and polymathic individual, Davy looked upon Ayurveda, the principal traditional therapy he had come in contact with, as a pseudo-science. He considered the Ayurvedic system fanciful, its anatomical studies non-existent and its pathology notional. In his view, the Ayurvedic system was unscientific, personalised, amateurish, uninstitutionalised and stagnant.¹¹

The Domestication of the 'English Doctor'

For the 'English doctor' to be made a permanent part of the Ceylonese physical and intellectual landscape, certain factors had to exist. One was the presence of a cadre of 'English doctors'. The other was the general acceptance of allopathic technology. The third was the introduction of allopathic technology by the government.

The typical 'English doctor' of the early nineteenth century was a native of Britain. Quite soon, the Burghers, the descendants of Dutch settlers in Ceylon, took up allopathy. Thus, the institution of the 'English doctor' was mediated into Ceylon by this 'people in-between'.¹²

While the service of the 'English doctor' was too expensive and sophisticated for the mass of the Ceylonese, it was accepted with alacrity by the affluent Ceylonese. It gave them added status. Further, there was the assurance that the diseases of the good and the great would not be bruited about in the marketplace.

The government's thrust towards the institution of the 'English doctor' was not elite-driven. The government desired only some medical technology to control the spread of disease. After annexing the kingdom of Kandy in 1815, the government had built a number of arterial roads which facilitated the movement of the people as also the transmission of contagious and infectious diseases. An outbreak of smallpox convinced the government that immediate remedial steps should be taken. The government moved to establish local boards of health in towns. These were local government bodies which looked after urban health and sanitation.¹³

¹¹ John Davy, M.D., F.R.S., *An Account of the Interior of Ceylon and of its Inhabitants*, 1821, Dehiwela, 1969 rpt., pp. 184-86.

¹² Michael Roberts, Ismeth Raheem and Percy Colin-Thorne, *People In-between: The Burghers and the Middle Class in the Transformations Within Sri Lanka, 1790s-1980s*, Ratmalana, 1989, Vol. I, p. 90 and *passim*.

¹³ G.C. Mendis, *Ceylon under the British*, Colombo, 1944, p. 54.

To contain pandemics and to prevent depopulation of unhealthy areas, the government decided on a two-pronged approach. One was the setting up of government hospitals and dispensaries. The other was the establishment of a government medical school. Both were low profile, almost 'bare-foot', facilities. The idea of establishing a medical school originated with the then Governor, Sir George Anderson, in 1852. Later, the Principal Civil Medical Officer, Dr Charsley, acting on a recommendation of Dr Loos, Colombo surgeon.

adopted the idea and advised the foundation of an 'elementary school' capable of giving a practical course in medicine, surgery and midwifery. The scheme was accepted by the Government.¹⁴

The Medical School was opened in Colombo in 1870. The Chairman of the Colombo Medical School Jubilee Association wrote in 1995:

Elementary it must have been; for there were 25 students and three teachers. The latter, including the Principal, were drawn from the Health Department, more on a basis of transfer rather than of selection. It might astound many a GCE/AL student of today to learn that the entry requirements were 'an ability to read and write English and Sinhalese or Tamil; and a knowledge of arithmetic including vulgar fractions'. Those not sufficiently versed in one of the vernacular languages were required to have 'some knowledge of Latin . . .'. The financial commitment was consent to the payment of two sterling pounds per session (believed to be calculated at 10 rupees per pound). Even that the Governor was authorised to waive at his discretion.¹⁵

Clearly none expected the children of the indigenous elite to grace the portals of the Colombo Medical School.

These were several strands to the government's thinking. A hierarchy of medical personnel was envisaged. At the top was the British 'English doctor', followed by the British-trained indigenous 'English doctor' and then, the indigenous 'English doctor' produced by the Colombo Medical School.

Another unstated assumption, still ruling today, was that the government would employ those trained at the Colombo Medical School. Traditional therapies were marginalised. Allopathy was adopted by the government as

¹⁴ *The Calendar of the University of Ceylon for Sessions 1955-56*, Colombo, p. 28. Dr Loos was a Burgher.

¹⁵ *The Island; Supplement for Colombo Medical School 125 Years Anniversary*, Colombo, 1 June 1995, p. 4. The General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level) (GCE/AL) is the pre-medical course taught in senior secondary schools in Sri Lanka. It comprises for medical entry purposes, Chemistry, Physics, Botany and Zoology.

its own system officially, at least for the reason that traditional therapists could not be regimented into a peripatetic organisation.

Ceylon differs from some other Asian countries in that private enterprise, whether missionary or otherwise, has not been successful in producing allopathic doctors. The attempt by the American Methodists (now known as the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India) to train allopaths in 1833 petered out after some years.¹⁶ It was the Colombo Medical School, suitably beefed up and elitised, which was to be the engine of growth of Western medicine in Sri Lanka. It was, of course, government-owned and government-run.

The Elitisation of the 'English Doctor'

Implicit in the domestication of the institution of the 'English doctor' was its elitisation. This had several facets. One was the elite element in the profession itself, whether traditional or otherwise. Another was the elite element among the doctors. (A few of the non-affluent Burghers and others, through extraordinary ability or luck, found themselves reading medicine in Britain.) Yet another were the elites among the patients.

While the elite patients insisted on their being offered elite treatment, the government, or more properly the British Raj in Ceylon, was democratising, officially, the social system and its health services. None was denied government assistance, in any field, on account of caste. However, it would seem that caste feelings lay in the soft underbelly of the social structure, secretive but potent. Hence, a discussion of caste seems essential to delineate properly the elitisation process of the 'English doctor'.

The caste system among the Sinhalese, the largest community in Sri Lanka, is a hierarchy of petrified occupations which confers elitism or non-elitism. In 1971, it was observed that three-fourths of the Low Country Sinhalese (that is, those living in the Sri Lankan littoral) belonged to 'high castes' which included, in descending order, the Govi (cultivators) and their sub-clans; the Karava (fishers) and their sub-clans; the Salagama (cinnamon-peelers) and their sub-clans; and the Durava (toddy-tappers).¹⁷ Among the Tamils, the largest minority in Sri Lanka, the caste structure is practically the same, with the important difference that the Vellala, rather like the Govi among the Sinhalese, controlled 'most of the land and have maintained a virtual monopoly on higher education'.¹⁸

¹⁶ Article on Tamil in *Pageant of Lanka*, Colombo, 1948, n.p. Also, Jane Russell, *Communal Politics under the Donoughmore Constitution 1931-1947*, Dehiwela, 1982, p. 21.

¹⁷ Richard F. Nyrop et al., *Area Handbook for Ceylon*, Washington D.C., 1971, p. 106. Also, for similar views, Amarasiri Weeraratne, 'Casteism in the Sinhalese Sangha' *The Island*, 3 July 1997, and V. Seelananda Thero, 'Role of Buddhism', *The Island*, 15 July 1997.

¹⁸ Nyrop et al., *Area Handbook for Ceylon*, p. 107.

While caste inequalities could be stomached in a primitive agro-economy, which Ceylon was till 1815, they were irritating, archaic thorns in the open economy introduced by the British. The inequalities became sharply focused after 1852 when monoculture—first coffee, then tea—became established in Ceylon. The non-Govi, mainly Karava, who became rich through the plantation economy, resented and resisted these caste constraints.¹⁹ The non-Govi affluent sought countervailing measures against the 'caste snobbery' of the Govi. The institution of the 'English doctor' was rich with possibilities and this was not just for the non-Govi.

So the institution of the 'English doctor' as health-provider attracted both the Govi and the non-Govi affluent. The sojourn in Britain, the acquisition of the Oxford accent, the adoption of a British middle class lifestyle, together with medical expertise, were for the Govi affluent yet another demonstration of their innate high caste status.²⁰ As British-qualified medical men, they were close to the British ruling class in Ceylon, from the Governor downwards. Besides, apart from government practice, there was a lucrative practice from the elite public. Even as late as 1929 a government gynaecologist could write:

In 1929 my earning from private practice amounted to Rs 62,013. In a previous year (1926) it had reached the peak of Rs 98,000. The pay I received from the Government for hospital work and teaching at the Medical College amounted to Rs 500 a month.²¹

To the non-Govi affluent, of course, these private emoluments did not matter. They were exceedingly rich as they were. What mattered was status. Their new-found status gave them a portable environment of superiority. By dispensing medical expertise, in an 'English environment' (which they controlled) to the Govi, they could erase any sense of caste 'inferiority'.

The essence of perceived 'superiority' lay in the achievement; not in the continued application of the craft. For instance, one non-Govi doctor had superb academic credentials. He had been senior physician at the Colombo General Hospital. In the course of his medical studies, he had qualified for the gold medal at the M.D. examination but was pipped at the post by Lord Dawson.²² Later, in 1911, he was to contest for the Educated Ceylonese

¹⁹ Mendis, *Ceylon under the British*, p. 60

²⁰ For a cosy view of upper caste Sinhalese society, see Yasmine Gooneratne, *Relative Merits*, London, 1986. For an earlier account of a non-Govi version, see V.S.M. de Mel, ed., *The De Soyza Saga*, Colombo, 1986, which was published in Sinhala in 1904

²¹ de Zilwa, *Scenes of a Life Time*, p. 171. For the present-day value of the Sri Lankan rupee, the figures need multiplication at least 50 times.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 110.

Seat in the Ceylon Legislative Council, 'having abandoned the practice of medicine for the life of a rich landowner'.²³

Perhaps this is a case of the functional elite becoming a political elite, but a political elite still constrained by the caste base from which it had evolved.²⁴ As Bêteille has noted, 'Westernisation thus imports a new system of values, new norms, all of these being mediated through an educational process'.²⁵ This process of 'side-stepping' caste could be called a form of Sanskritisation. But there are two differences. First, all members of the 'low castes' (in this case, the non-Govi) cannot participate in this new mental environment. Second, when the 'higher castes' themselves acquire this process or technique, the Sanskritisation comes to an end.

The Empowerment of the 'English Doctor'

All linkages of elitism ultimately connected up to the Colombo Medical School, the one and only teaching school in Ceylon attached to the Colombo General Hospital. This Hospital was (and is) the biggest health care institution in Ceylon. Quite early in its career, the Colombo Medical School divested itself of its original 'barefoot' status and was on its way to being a clone of the British medical schools.

The required legal changes took place progressively. By 1888 the General Medical Council of Britain recognised the Licentiate in Medicine and Surgery (LMS) of the Colombo Medical School. This enabled the LMS holder to register himself in the Colombo List of the Registrar, Medical Council under Section 13 of the Medical Act of 1886.²⁶

The new status of the Colombo Medical School (henceforth to be known as the Ceylon Medical College) was officially recognised when the Medical College (Ceylon) Incorporation Ordinance, received the assent of the Governor of Ceylon on 31 July 1905. The Medical College Council carried on the dual functions of providing medical education as well as that of regulating the profession till 1924. In that year a new body, the Ceylon Medical Council, took over the latter function.²⁷

²³ K.M. de Silva and Howard Wriggins, *J.R. Jayawardena of Sri Lanka—A Political Biography, Vol. I, 1906–1956*, London, 1988, p. 49

²⁴ An elite which is functional in nature, depending on the essentiality of its services, might transform itself into a politicised or political elite, as say, for instance, the Brahmins of Tamil Nadu

²⁵ André Bêteille, *The Future of the Backward Classes: The Competing Demands of Status and Power*, in Philip Mason, ed., *India and Ceylon: Unity and Diversity, A Symposium*, London, 1967, p. 104

²⁶ *The Calendar, 1955–56*, pp. 28–29.

²⁷ *Ibid.* The Ceylon Medical Council was further reconstituted by Ord. no. 26 of 1927, later amended by Ord. no. 5 of 1930. Most recent Acts are the Universities Act (no. 16 of 1978) as amended by Act. no. 7 of 1985. The rules of MBBS degree are laid down in Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery Degree, By-Laws no. 5 of 1986

The supply of the 'English doctor' being thus assured, the government moved to create demand. It set up a large number of hospitals and dispensaries in 'disease-loci'. These were the route stations of the plantation workers who walked from Mannar (the coastal town close to south India) to their plantations in the hill country. They were widely regarded as carriers of infectious diseases. Towns and townlets also received these facilities.²⁸ The government emphasised the importance of prevention by paying the 'English doctors' of the preventive side a higher starting salary.²⁹

The hierarchical structure of the 'English doctor' took the following shape in the 1920s, the high noon of British imperialism in Ceylon. At the top, there were the senior physicians and surgeons of the Colombo General Hospital who also held teaching posts in the Ceylon Medical College. They carried on expensive private practice in their spare time. However, being Ceylonese, they could not hold administrative posts in the government medical service, even if highly qualified.³⁰ Thus, they could not hold the lectureship of physiology, for instance, because it went together with the post of Registrar of the Ceylon Medical College. These were earmarked for the British medical men.

Beneath these local medical grandees there were the normal physicians and surgeons working in the provinces. Below them were the young 'English doctors'. Besides these government medical men, there existed a group of 'English doctors' who had retired or resigned. They preferred to be family doctors or general practitioners (GPs). Some of them had money of their own. Others were scions of established medical families. Several took to politics, at the national or local government level.³¹ Still, all of them were proud of being 'English doctors' and looked upon the practitioners of other systems as 'quacks'.

As for the status-conscious indigenous affluent, as years passed, their perceptions shifted. They realised that the institution of the 'English doctor' had become the preserve of hardworking middle-class men, with less money, less family pride and more application. With old money at their back, the status-conscious elite tended to drift into politics or law or the Civil Service, where their poise and their connections, brought them very close to the corridors of power.

The Nationalisation of the 'English Doctor'

The Donoughmore Constitution, which was in operation in Ceylon from 1931 to 1947, gave internal responsibility to the Ceylonese legislators,

²⁸ Mendis, *Ceylon under the British*, p. 89.

²⁹ R.R. Crosette-Thambiah, *Stranger in His Land*, Colombo, n.d., p. 24.

³⁰ de Zilwa, *Scenes of a Life Time*, p. 127.

³¹ For instance, Dr M.C.M. Kaleel and Dr R. Atapattu became Cabinet Ministers. Dr S.A. Wickremasinghe was MP for a considerable period. Dr R. Saravanamuttu was Mayor of Colombo Municipal Council and was later knighted.

including the health and education portfolios.³² Both these gave a new thrust to social and economic development.

In 1942, when George E. de Silva, a non-Govi lawyer and politician close to the ordinary people (and for that reason called by them 'Our George'), became Minister of Health, he realised that the rural poor were not being adequately served by the government. His answer was to establish 250 rural or cottage hospitals all over Ceylon. He said, in 1942, that,

in the village areas, these rural hospitals are going to be the centres from which knowledge of public health will be disseminated. Each one will cater to the needs of about 20,000 people.³³

The upshot of this scheme was that the 'English doctors', at least the younger ones, had a perennial demand for their services.

Meanwhile, the Executive Committee of Education, which was in charge of national education, introduced the Free Education Scheme which became law in June 1945. This law abolished fees and tuition in all government schools.³⁴ Till then, the urban poor could educate their children, at best, up to Grade 10 only. This enabled their children to apply for relatively minor posts such as railway guards, postmasters or clerks. Now the way was open for them to become 'English doctors'.³⁵

The rural hospitals broadened the village clientele of the 'English doctor' and the Free Education Scheme broadened the supply of the 'English doctor'. The urban clientele was being expanded too, with the increase in English education and the consequent job opportunities. These changes in health and education were to have a profound impact on the political elite who supported the 'English doctor'. Discussing the composition of the Ceylonese political elite (as members of the Ceylon Legislative Councils and the State Councils between 1924 and 1948), M.A. Singer identified some key factors. These included high caste membership, largely Christian in faith, high Western education and high-level membership in superior economic and social classes.³⁶ Ten years after 1945, these dominant factors changed. The Sinhala village elites (the *bhikku*, the Ayurvedic physician and the schoolmaster) became dominant. The latter two entered Parliament.

³² Sir Ivor Jennings, *The Commonwealth in Asia*, Oxford, 1951, p. 71.

³³ Jane Russell, *Our George: A Biography of George Edmund de Silva*, Colombo, 1981, p. 104.

³⁴ Nyrop et al., *Area Handbook for Ceylon*, p. 151.

³⁵ N.D. Wijesekera, *Sir D.B. Jayatilaka: A Biography and an Assessment of the Man and His Works*, Colombo, 1973, p. 3.

³⁶ M.A. Singer, *The Emerging Elite: A Study of Political Leadership in Ceylon*, Cambridge, Mass., 1964, cited in Janice Jiggins, *Caste and Family in the Politics of the Sinhalese, 1947-1976*, Cambridge, 1979, p. 23.

English education was not a *sine qua non* of politics; grass-roots electoral activism was.

The Colombo Medical College became more elitist than ever before. Henceforth, it was the Colombo Medical College that conferred elite status on its alumni, the 'English doctors'. The Second World War had denuded Britain of her excess medical graduates. So the vacancies in the Colombo Medical College could be filled by the locals. Earlier, the vacancies were so rare that one Ceylonese 'English doctor' who had an FRCS, had to return to England twice to emerge as ENT specialist and then again as a gynaecologist, to obtain a teaching post in the Colombo Medical College.³⁷

The Colombo Medical College was being prepared as a clone of the medical schools in Britain. In 1942, through the University of Ceylon (Incorporation) Ordinance, the University College and the Colombo Medical College were fused into a single University of Ceylon. The Colombo Medical College became the Medical Faculty of the University of Ceylon.

The medical courses were the same as those in Britain's medical schools.³⁸ The year 1954 is important. It was the year when every medical student as well as other undergraduates had had totally free education from the kindergarten onwards. After that year, owing to the emergence of a new political sensibility, there was a continuous fall in the standards of teaching English. This situation progressively took medical training away from the British model.

Medical texts used in the Medical Faculty were those current in Britain.³⁹ Departments were articulated and grouped under a Dean. In 1954 the departments of the Medical Faculty were 24 in number, with varying teacher densities; for instance, the Department of Anatomy had 10 teachers; dermatology had one.⁴⁰

Understandably, the staple qualifications of the medical teachers were those of the Colombo Medical College, their alma mater. In 1954 there were 34 teachers with LMS and 41 with MBBS, the former being the older ones. Higher degrees were invariably British.⁴¹ Professional distinctions

³⁷ H.A.J. Hulugalle, *Some Friends in Profile*, Colombo, 1989, p. 90. For the intellectual labours of the 'English doctor', see Adrian Senedhira, *History of Scientific Literature in Sri Lanka*, Colombo, 1995, *passim*.

³⁸ University of Ceylon, Ord (1942), chap. V, Pt. iv, laid down the procedures for the conferment of MBBS degrees.

³⁹ For instance, the class texts in physiology were the works of Bell, Davidson and Scarborough, Newton, Lovat Evans and Fulton on Howell. Research and reference texts were the same: Best and Taylor, Samson Wright, Houssey and Wiggers were among those most used. Of these, works such as Samson Wright are still current.

⁴⁰ *The Calendar, 1955-56*, pp. 12-17.

⁴¹ In 1953, there were 11 teachers with Ph.D. (London), three had D. Phil. (Oxon), 12 were M.D. (London), two had M.Sc. and one M.S. from the same university.

had the same British slant.⁴² Diplomas in specific medical disciplines from Britain were fully represented.

It was no wonder that the Medical Faculty looked like a little bit of England set down in Ceylon. Some despairing souls were critical of this 'Britishisation'. One doctor, who later rose to high administrative office in Asian health services, wrote despondently in the 1970s, looking back on his student days:

Our medical studies [were] modelled strictly on the British pattern, which heavily emphasised theory. Enormously big textbooks in Anatomy and Physiology have to be mugged up and two years of hard swotting is judged in a few hours, at a surprise attack that examinations have been rightly called. If you are lucky enough to have read up what is asked and are able to spit it out within the required time, you are through. If not, though you may know a lot else, you are ploughed.⁴³

If the smallness of the intake of medical students is an index of elitism, the Medical Faculty was certainly elitist. Only a few schools in Ceylon, roughly a dozen in number, taught pre-medical, pre-university courses, called the bio-science stream of the Higher School Certificate Examination.⁴⁴ Table 1 needs to be looked at against this background.

The following inferences from Table 1 seem legitimate:

1. Compared to MBBS men, the number of MBBS women is low. This is due to lack of girl's schools with science classes. Marginal middle-class families preferred to have their sons educated in medicine. Traditional families considered medical studies too strenuous or 'earthy' for girls. (Even today women specialise in 'friendly' disciplines like gynaecology, obstetrics, paediatrics or ophthalmology.)
2. The median MBBS woman, apparently, did not strive for excellence. At that time, equal opportunities for women were not encouraged by the government or the private sector. For instance, till the 1960s prestigious government posts, such as the Ceylon Civil Service, and senior staff appointments were closed to women. Hence, MBBS women had few chances to prove themselves.
3. Within a decade the number of MBBS of both genders had increased tenfold. This was certainly due to the Free Education Scheme.

⁴² There were eight FRCS; FRCP numbered two and same was the number of the MRCS. Those who held the MRCP and the LRCP were eight and seven respectively. The LRCP&S (Edinburgh) and the LRCP&S (Glasgow) were represented by eight and seven holders respectively. There was one FRIC, two were qualified as FRARCS, three were FRCS (Edinburgh). Besides, there were three MCOG and MOG. Cf. *The Calendar, 1955-56*, pp. 12-17.

⁴³ Crossetto-Thambiah, *Stranger in His Land*, p. 17.

⁴⁴ Half of these schools were in Colombo.

Table 1
Medical Graduates of Ceylon, 1943-1954

Year	Men MBBS			Women MBBS		
	1st Class	2nd Class	Pass	1st Class	2nd Class	Pass
1943	2	2	9	—	—	2
1944	1	9	16	1	1	—
1945	4	6	24	—	4	3
1946	4	19	31	—	—	4
1947	1	15	23	—	2	1
1948	1	26	41	—	—	3
1949	2	17	41	—	1	3
1950	—	4	10	—	2	—
1951	1	10	14	—	2	—
1952	—	7	58	—	2	3
1953	—	9	74	—	5	15
1954	—	26	80	—	4	17

Source: *The Calendar, 1955-56*, pp 423-57⁴⁵

4. The last few years of Table 1 show the absence of students securing First Class. There is a progressive diminution of First Class degrees. For instance, by 1943 standards there should have been 11 First Classes in 1954, but there were none.

The qualitative programming of the MBBS examination influenced the professional and social standing of the 'English doctor'. It introduced a differentiating process. First Class MBBS men and a few exceptional Second Class holders were appointed lecturers of the Medical Faculty or went into senior government medical administration. Pass-men were sent into backwoods government service as District Medical Assistants (DMAs) and rose up to District Medical Officers (DMOs) and then latched onto government medical administration, the top post of which was that of Director of Medical and Sanitary Services. Other pass-men, after a mandatory period of government service, returned to private practice as GPs. (The hierarchy is much convoluted today.)

The Ruralisation (or Dilution) of the 'English Doctor'

After 1956, the government had a mandate from the electorate to empower the rural poor. Their medical empowerment meant the replacement of English as the school medium; the setting up of additional medical faculties;

⁴⁵ Sourced from *The Calendar, 1955-56*, pp 423-57.

and the conferment of privileges (weightage) on the rural pre-medical students. The last item was necessary because most rural students lacked teachers, school buildings, science facilities, libraries, transport services and even adequate housing.

The government proceeded to implement these policies. In 1956, through Act No. 33, Sinhala was made the official language. Sinhala and Tamil progressively became the media of instruction. The University of Ceylon, which till then taught in English only, agreed to teach in English, Sinhala and Tamil from January 1957.⁴⁶

It seemed that the elitism of the 'English doctor' was being shown the door. But as events worked out, elitism returned through the window. The problems were that most Medical Faculty (of the University of Ceylon) teachers did not feel themselves competent to teach in Sinhala or Tamil. Further, a great deal of English medical texts had to be translated into Sinhala. It might be estimated that in the disciplines of anatomy, physiology, biochemistry, parasitology, microbiology, pharmacology, pathology, forensic medicine, community medicine, medicine, paediatrics, surgery, gynaecology and psychiatry, a total of 71 English texts used today need translation.⁴⁷ The problem of translation becomes worse since medical journals too need translation.⁴⁸ In some subjects, the latest editions need to be used.⁴⁹ So it became clear that no efforts, however herculean, could complete the intended translation programme. (There was no such consuming need for Tamil translations for those were available from Tamil Nadu.)

Hence, a crash course of English was given to the medical students before they entered the Medical Faculty. (In fact, this practice still continues.) Critics contended that such crash courses were neither educationally sound nor morally defensible. To turn a medical student, who had been taught in Sinhala or Tamil for 12 years, into an English adept, through a few months' intensive course, was illusory unless he came from an English-oriented family.

The second item in the alleviation programme was more practicable. In addition to the Medical Faculty, the government established medical faculties in the universities situated in the northern, central, southern and western Provinces. So, the rural sector was (and is) fairly well-served by medical teaching institutions.

⁴⁶ *Ferguson's Directory for 1970-71*, Colombo, 112th Edition, p. 49

⁴⁷ *University of Colombo, Sri Lanka, Calendar 1996-1997*, Colombo, pp. 700-31

⁴⁸ These journals include *Ceylon Medical Journal*; *British Medical Journal*; *New England Journal of Medicine*; *Lancet*; *Medicine International*. *University of Colombo Calendar 1996-1997*, p. 724.

⁴⁹ For instance, the Medical Faculty recommended the use of the latest editions, for example, of H.W. Brown and D.L. Bolding, *Basic Clinical Parasitology*, New York; Ralph Muller, *Worms and Disease*, London; van M. Roitt, *Essential Immunology*, Oxford, 1992, *University of Colombo Calendar 1996-1997*, p. 705.

To give weightage to rural medical students, the government took several steps. Up to 1970, streamlining of arts, science and commerce classes took place in the eighth grade. Today, it takes place in Grade 11. Laboratory work has been replaced with the mainly futile, continuous assessment schemes. Hence, rural schools which lack science facilities are not impeded from presenting students for medical faculties.

Another device is the district quota system which assures university places for both urban and rural areas. Basic to this scheme is the standardisation of marks. A student from a backward area needs lower marks to enter medical faculties than a student from a developed area. Thus, for instance, in 1997 the minimum marks of entry to medical faculties were: 285 for Colombo district; 240 for Trincomalee district; 221 for Badulla (Uva) district.⁵⁰

All these have led to a great increase in the intake of medical students from 80 students in 1952 to over 1,000 in 1997.⁵¹ Critics have claimed that this too was elitism. It was the elitism of the incompetent, the less informed and the rustic. The decline in the competence in English of the new doctors has hindered them from acquiring professional qualifications from abroad. To remove this disadvantage, an Institute of Post-Graduate Medicine was established in 1974.⁵² At present attached to the University of Colombo, it provides the MD in 10 specialisations; and the MS and the M.Sc. in five and two specialisations respectively.⁵³ Some critics fear that these do not give high exposure to modern medical technology as offered by the FRCS and the FRCP.

Today, the institution of the 'English doctor' seems to have split into a threefold division. The first is the 'English doctor' from fairly affluent urban families, adept in English, able to do post-graduate study and practise abroad. This type is the natural heir to the former elite 'English doctor'. The second type has had some exposure to English and can transform himself through hard work into the first type. The third, the most preponderant among medical entrants, is competent in Sinhala or Tamil alone. He may well find medical studies strange or forbidding. Nevertheless, all three types are conscious of their elite status. Some observers have pointed out that the increased militancy of medical trade

⁵⁰ *The Island*, 4 January 1997. Colombo district is regarded as the most developed area. Badulla and Trincomalee are rather underdeveloped areas.

⁵¹ Family Physician (*nom-de-plume* of correspondent), Letter to Editor, *The Island*, 27 June 1996

⁵² The Post-Graduate Institute of Medicine was established by the Institute of Post-Graduate Medicine Statute (no. 1 of 1974). It was re-established by the Post-Graduate Institute of Medicine Ordinance (no. 1 of 1980) made under the Universities Act (no. 16 of 1978)

⁵³ Its MD courses range from community medicine to radiology, its MS are in Surgery and Dental Surgery, as well as in Ophthalmology and Otolaryngology. One of its M.Sc. courses is in health education. Its diplomas range from general dental practice to pathology. *University of Colombo Calendar, 1996-1997*, pp. 996-97

unions and the pervasive concern for salary increases and perquisites arise from the influence exerted by the third type on the profession as a whole.

The Iconisation (and later Demonisation) of the 'English Doctor'

The whole thrust of medical administration and medical thinking in Sri Lanka is based on the first type of the 'English doctor'. This hegemony became marked after 1977 when the Open Economy and its attendant globalisation were introduced in Sri Lanka. English came into its own. In the early 1900s, medical elitism meant that the affluent took to 'English' medicine while the rest followed traditional therapies. Now, medical elitism means that the elites follow 'higher medicine' and the rest of the population make do with the 'lower medicine'. Interestingly, both are practised by the same 'English doctors' in different places, at different times.

Institutional changes lie behind this twofold division. The Medical Faculty of the University of Colombo, along with the teaching hospital (Colombo General Hospital) has become the acme of medical technology in Sri Lanka. Now, its academic staff includes 112 full-time members.⁵⁴ It has 14 departments of study and 12 units.⁵⁵

This elitism, driven by technical sophistication, advanced teaching practice and expensive drugs is not an elitism based on caste or a life of service of commitment but one whose engine is wealth. This 'higher medicine' confers on its patients added status and on its practitioners large fees.

By definition, the aim of medical practice is the cure of disease. But when iconisation takes place, as it does in 'higher medicine', the process is more important than the cure. The locus of the 'higher medicine', is the expensive private hospital, which can be easily mistaken for a high class (five-star) hotel. The physician in 'higher medicine' is the principal actor in a stage drama in which the patient is also an actor. Support staff such as nurses and attendants are walk-on parts. The wards, the intensive care units, and the centres of excellence are only changing scenes. The paraphernalia of medical investigations are the props. The physicians (and the surgeons) get the adulation which leading actors receive. (If the patient survives, it is a comedy; if he dies, it is a tragedy. In both cases the performance is completed.)

Other characteristics of 'higher medicine' and the iconising process include the following aspects:

1. There is the 'metropolising syndrome'. 'Higher medicine' in the sense of expensive practitioners, support staff and exclusive health clinics are found only in Colombo and a few large towns. All patients

⁵⁴ *The Island Supplement for Colombo Medical School*, June 1995, p. 3.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

of affluent means must 'metropolise' themselves by coming there. The President of the Sri Lanka College of Surgeons in his official address in 1996 pointed out that half of the general surgeons and most of the specialty surgeons are found in Colombo and a few large towns and that there were several districts without a surgeon.⁵⁶

2. There is the tendency for the rich, with or without medical need, to go to the top medical men. This is a matter of status. A senior medical officer deplored this situation, adding that for a specialist to act like a general practitioner was a waste of scarce resources.⁵⁷
3. Expensive private hospitals have come up in Colombo and a few towns recently. These are essentially centres for crisis-management. These are expensively equipped and superbly maintained. For very high fees they provide exclusive care. As a rule, the same 'English doctor' works in the free government hospital and in the costly private one in his spare time. In the former, he dispenses rough-and-ready medical assistance. In the latter, he is the caring medical expert. Such is the general perception in Sri Lanka.

If money is the ruling motive of 'higher medicine', sheer necessity is the animator of 'lower medicine'. Today in Sri Lanka, with a population of 20 million, there are about 4,000 qualified 'English doctors' working in government hospitals and about 600 in private practice. In addition there are 900 Registered Medical Practitioners (RMP) and Assistant Medical Practitioners (AMP) who are pharmacists and apothecaries, given the right of practising as 'English doctors'. They have obtained this concession after many years of service under MBBS men. The total medical personnel would come to 5,500, giving a ratio to total population of 1 : 3,600.⁵⁸ However, the ratio is skewed because the medical personnel are mainly concentrated in municipal and urban areas, so much so that in a town like Colombo the ratio is about 1 : 250 while in a remote hamlet like Anamaduwa, it would be 1 : 20,000.⁵⁹

The patients of the 'lower medicine' are the urban and rural poor who 'patronise' free government hospitals. Government hospitals today have a total bed strength of 50,000, and they have the finest medical technology. Public opinion, however, holds the view that their maintenance and staff-patient relationships need much improvement.

The physicians of the 'lower medicine' are either junior 'English doctors' or those who have been overlooked for promotions or other benefits. There are, of course, exceptions. Since their ideal role model is the prominent physician in government service working in exclusive private

⁵⁶ Professor A.P.R. Aluwihara, speech reported in *The Island*, 11 July 1996.

⁵⁷ Dr Susirith Mendis, 'Consultants and Their Duties', *The Island*, 19 June 1996.

⁵⁸ Family Physician, *The Island*, 27 June 1996.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* Anamaduwa is a very underdeveloped village in the North-Western Province of Sri Lanka.

hospitals, their attitude towards patients lacks the beside manner. For instance, a Sri Lankan daily, in 1996, published an editorial which said that the average Sri Lankan doctor was haughty and treated his patients as inferiors or even as imbeciles.⁶⁰

On the other hand, the third type of 'English doctor' has the sneaking fear that as far as knowledge of English is concerned, he and his patient are at the same level. In days gone by, the thorough knowledge of English which a doctor possessed surrounded him like an invisible fence. The question of language also informs the relationship between the 'English doctor' of today and the RMPs and the AMPs. Formerly RMPs and AMPs came from families of lower economic status and less English than the 'English doctors', but not any longer. Indeed, the difference between the 'English doctor' of today and the AMP and the RMP might be just a few more marks or a greater 'weightage'. So these 'subordinate professions' do not concede any superiority in status to the 'English doctor'. From their point of view, only a higher salary separates them from the 'English doctor'. Apparently, the RMP and the AMP feel that the salary scale of the 'English doctor' is excessive. An official of an organisation which includes the RMPs and the AMPs, pointed out in 1997 that it would take more than 18 years for an AMP to obtain a salary at par with the basic salary of a medical graduate (the 'English doctor').⁶¹

In addition, another group has taken cudgels against the 'English doctor', or more specifically, the 'English doctors' other than specialists, who are in government service, viz., the Government Medical Officers Association (GMOA). At present, those who cannot enter medical faculties in Sri Lanka and who are affluent enough, go abroad and study medicine. When they return as medical graduates, they are required to pass a medical examination in writing before they can begin practice in Sri Lanka. This is mandatory under Section 29(1)(b) of the Medical Ordinance. The Foreign Medical Students Parents Association (FMSPA) had complained that these examinations are being progressively made more difficult.⁶² As if to assert its hard-won elitism, it is said that the GMOA has adopted a stance of muscular trade unionism, threatening to strike if its demands are not met by government health authorities. These demands include salary increases and transfer of personnel.

Thus, in Sri Lanka, it might be said that the evolution of the 'English doctor' has passed from an achieved elite status to a beleaguered (monetised) contractual elite status.

⁶⁰ *The Island*, 5 April 1996

⁶¹ *The Island*, 21 May 1997.

⁶² *The Island*, 16 September 1997.

Who was Himmat Bahadur? Gosains, Rajputs and the British in Bundelkhand, ca. 1800

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He humiliates his enemies and scorches them in their jungle hideaways. He shows his long-armed compassion for the poor during religious sacrifices.

He gives endowments to support dharma, and is the clothing that covers Hindu shame.

He is the embodiment of radiant splendour, but an insatiable demon when his anger is provoked.

Padmakar
Himmatbahadur Birdavali, ca. 1793¹

These words were sung in praise of Himmat Bahadur Anupgiri Gosain, northern India's most celebrated ascetic warlord. Anupgiri (as I shall refer to him) began his military career in the 1740s as the *chela* or disciple of Rajendragiri Gosain of Moth, near Jhansi in Bundelkhand. After Rajendragiri's death, Anupgiri became a mainstay of the Awadhi army (and

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¹ Edited by Bhagvandin, second ed., Banaras-Kashi Nagaripracharani Sabha, n.d., but probably early 1920s.

earned the title 'Himmat Bahadur', the great and courageous) at its peak under Shuja ud-Daula in the 1750s and 1760s. In 1775 he left the Awadhi service, joined the Persian adventurer Najaf Khan, and became embroiled in (and a major contributor to) the snakepit of late-Mughal politics along the Delhi-Agra axis. In the 1780s, following Najaf's death, he was instrumental in Mahadji Shinde's ascendancy over the Mughal emperor, but then had a falling out with the Maratha warlord in 1788. In 1790 he joined forces with another Maratha adventurer, Ali Bahadur, and returned to Bundelkhand; by 1793 they were the main powers there and Anupgiri had begun referring to himself as '*Maharaja* Himmat Bahadur'. In 1802 Ali Bahadur died, leaving Anupgiri as the single most powerful warlord in the province. Then, in 1803, Anupgiri allied himself to the British and handed Bundelkhand to them, only to die himself in 1804 while assisting the Company in the 'settlement' of the province.

From the British perspective, the alliance with Anupgiri in 1803 was crucial: the Bengal Army under Lord Lake was making significant advances up the Gangetic plain to Delhi, thus certifying itself as the major power in subcontinental politics and guaranteeing a supply of troops that would enable Britain to retain and extend its global influence in the early nineteenth century despite the loss of the American colonies.² Bundelkhand, as rugged as it was, represented the strategically soft underbelly of the Gangetic north. By allying with Anupgiri, the British prevented the Maratha armies from using the region as a staging ground in the Anglo-Maratha war of 1803-1805 for attacks on Company supply lines passing through nearby Allahabad—particularly along the Jamuna, the northernmost extremity of the Bundelkhandi frontier.

What is less clear is why Anupgiri chose to turn his back on his considerable Maratha connections and join forces with the British. In this article, I examine the remarkable career of this Gosain warlord, in part to answer this question but also to increase our understanding of the complex politics of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century northern India more generally. Anupgiri's decision to ally himself to the British (and they to him) is noteworthy not simply because of the strategic location of Bundelkhand, but because he and many of his troops were armed ascetics (known variously as *gosains*, *sanyasis*, and *nagas*) similar in almost every way to those who had been suppressed by Company arms in Bengal during the previous four decades, in series of prolonged skirmishes that have come to be known as the 'Sanyasi and Fakir Rebellion'. The brutality of that extended conflict is captured best in James Rennell's account of an encounter with 700 armed ascetics. Rennell, the celebrated Company mapmaker had, in February 1766, joined in the hot pursuit of a large band of 'facquirs

² See C. A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780-1830*, London, 1989, and, on military labour, Seema Alavi, *The Sepoys and the Company: Tradition and Transition in Northern India, 1770-1830*, Delhi, 1995.

([*fakirs*] a kind of sturdy beggars)' said to be plundering the countryside of northern Bengal. Sent to reconnoiter a nearby village, he and his small cavalry escort found themselves suddenly surrounded and heavily outnumbered by the enemy. Several months later and still not fully recovered from the loss of blood, he described his narrow escape in a letter to a friend in England:

I was so entirely surrounded that I never expected to escape, but having the good Fortune to preserve my Sword I defended myself pretty well in Front and kept retreating backwards till I had very few behind me when I turned and fled for it. A hardy fellow followed me close, but paid the price of his Life for it; the rest of them thinking that I was too much wounded to run far, remained in their Places but kept a continual firing on me till I was out of sight; none of the Balls however hit me.

Providence surely strengthened my Arms whilst I was retreating; for now I found both of them deprived of their strength and indeed no Wonder, for one of them was cut in three places, and the shoulder bone belonging to the other divided. One stroke of a sabre had cut my right shoulder bone through, and laid me open for near a foot down the back cutting thro' or wounding several of the ribs. At my left elbow the muscular part was taken off the breadth of a hand; I had besides a stab in the same arm and a large cut on the hand which deprived me of the use of my forefinger. I had some other Scratches, and found a large cut across the back of my coat when it was taken off, but it being a Regimental Coat and consequently of Broadcloth it saved me from a cut which must in all probability have finished me if I had happened to have had on the thin Cloathing which is generally worn here.³

Such encounters did little to endear armed ascetics to Company officials; in 1773 Warren Hastings would issue a proclamation banning all armed *sanyasis* and *fakirs* from entering and traversing Bengal.⁴ However, Company collisions with armed ascetics only became more ferocious in the coming decades, and by the early 1800s the British had either eliminated them outright or driven them from the Presidency.⁵ It was clear that armed

³ Harsh wounds for the man who would become Britain's first imperial cartographer. Major James Rennell to the Reverend Gilbert Burrington, then Vicar of Chudleigh, 30 August 1766, Mss. Eur. D. 1073, Oriental and India Office Collection, London (hereafter OIOC). An abbreviated version of the passage can be found in *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical and Discursive*, compiled by Col. Henry Yule and A.C. Burnell, London, 1903, s.v. *Sunymsee*, p. 872.

⁴ Foreign Department, Secret Branch Proceedings, National Archives of India, New Delhi (hereafter NAI), nos 5 and 6, 21 January 1773.

⁵ For a blow-by-blow description of the campaigns, see J.M. Ghosh, *Sanyasi and Fakir Raiders in Bengal*, Calcutta, 1930. A.K. Dasgupta, *The Fakir and Sannyasi Uprisings*, Calcutta, 1992, provides a useful summary and social-historical analysis.

sadhus were the very antithesis of the world the Company state was endeavouring to create in the late eighteenth century, namely, a settled peasant society which would render forth vast agrarian revenues on a regular basis with as little resistance as possible.⁶ The alliance between Anupgiri and the Company could not have been taken lightly by either side.

Anupgiri was first and foremost a Gosain adventurer, and an examination of his life affords a closer view of an important military category of late medieval India, the Saiva (as in the case of Anupgiri) and Vaishnava *akharas*, or regimental units. Despite the existence of a not inconsiderable literature examining armed ascetics in Indian history,⁷ surprisingly little is known about the ways in which their asceticism may have informed their military service and vice versa. Even Jadunath Sarkar's otherwise fascinating *History of the Dasnami Naga Sanyasis*⁸ is of little use here: the first half (pp. 1–120, authored by Sarkar) is a description of the practices and structure of the Dasnami order, sectarian traditions regarding Sankaracharya and his teachings, and the supposed origins and dates of the military *akharas*; the second half (pp. 121–284, authored by Nirod Bhusan Roy of Santiniketan University using Sarkar's notes and manuscripts) is a readable narrative account of the careers of Anupgiri, his guru Rajendragiri, and his Gosain brother Umraogiri, but entirely lacking in any discussion of the ascetic institutions that invariably shaped their lives. Part of the reason for our relatively meagre understanding of the history of the ascetic armies is the difficulty of gaining access to documentary evidence (which, it should be noted, varies dramatically from *akhara* to *akhara*), the uneven reliability of some of that evidence, the generally questionable nature of oral tradition connected to the orders, and the impossibility of deducing the social and cultural history of the *akharas* from their present structures and practices.⁹ Added to this basic methodological obstacle is the astonishingly resilient

⁶ Ironically, Francis Buchanan noted in 1811 that many naga sadhus of Bihar had found employment 'in the armies of the Rajas beyond the Yamuna', raising the startling possibility that many armed ascetics driven out of greater Bengal by Company arms by 1800 may have found service with Anupgiri in Bundelkhand, and then allied to and working for the Company after 1803. Buchanan, *An Account of the Districts of Bihar and Patna in 1811–1812*, 1934, rpt., New Delhi, 1986, Vol. 1, 375.

⁷ That literature, which I cite in the course of this article, is reviewed in D. Lorenzen, 'Warrior Ascetics in Indian History', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 98, 1978, pp. 61–75.

⁸ Allahabad, n.d., but probably mid-1950s.

⁹ The problem of access is quite understandable, given that the amount known about the *akharas*, particularly by the state, has been indirectly proportional to their political and military autonomy—as is clear from the history recounted in the present article. As for reliability of sectarian evidence, Jadunath Sarkar, *History of the Dasnami Naga Sanyasis*, pp. 82–83, noted that the documents of the Dasnami *akharas* shown to him in the course of his research, though purported to be of great antiquity, were in his opinion no more than 50 years old.

presumption, despite much scholarship to the contrary, that Indian ascetics are fundamentally isolated from society and its social and political concerns—that they are and have always been ‘otherworldly’, anti-political and ideological neutral.¹⁰ And the few social historians who have sought to understand the complex role of ascetics and asceticism in Indian society have focused on economic and structural change and have shied away from discussions of politics and ideology, and, by implication, the transition to British rule.¹¹ The importance of Anupgiri, in this historiographical context, becomes clear: his rise to prominence in the politics of Mughal imperial decline and British imperial ascendancy meant that the *akharas* came under the scrutiny of diplomatic envoys and military officers concerned with the rudiments of military power and the political economy of recruitment not only as matters of basic political intelligence but as questions of political legitimacy.

Our poor understanding of the history of armed asceticism in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is all the more striking given the importance of the armed ascetic as a symbol of organic Indian patriotism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the survival of the *akharas* as important components of the modern Hindu monastic orders, and their increasing significance and visibility in the Hindu nationalist movement today.¹² Indeed, the increasing significance of the armed ascetic in national culture led one prominent member of the early twentieth century Hindi literati to deride Anupgiri as ‘a kind of traitor to his country’ for, among other things, serving ‘the foreigner and the irreligious *yavana*’.¹³ Such a criticism, guilty though it may be of applying a twentieth century standard of nationalist patriotism to assess a fundamentally pre-nationalist figure, behooves us to better understand the pressing contemporary circumstances that motivated Anupgiri before and after his alliance with the

¹⁰ The genealogy of this view is intricate and complicated and certainly predates Max Weber’s theorisation of ‘this-worldly’ versus ‘otherworldly’ asceticism. See e.g., the writings of J.C. Oman in the early twentieth century, particularly *The Mystics, Ascetics, and Saints of India: A Study of Sadhuism, with an Account of the Yogis, Sanyasis, Bairagis, and Other Strange Hindu Sectarians*, London, 1903. For a discussion of the evolution of official British apprehensions of Indian ascetics in the nineteenth century, see the introduction to Pinch, *Peasants and Monks in British India*, Berkeley, 1996.

¹¹ See especially B.S. Cohn, ‘The Role of the Gosains in the Economy of Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Upper India’, *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 1, 1964, pp. 175–82, D.H.A. Kolff, ‘Sanyasi Trader-Soldiers’, *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 8, 1971, pp. 213–20, and C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townspeople and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770–1870*, Cambridge, 1983, pp. 125–44, 242. Also emblematic of this tendency is Dasgupta, *The Fakir and Sannyasi Uprisings*, which focuses on economic and material causes.

¹² For a discussion of the ideological importance of armed ascetics in nationalist and post-nationalist India, see Pinch, ‘Soldier Monks and Militant Sadhus’, in David Ludden, ed., *Contesting the Nation: Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy in India*, Philadelphia, 1996, pp. 140–61.

¹³ Bhagvandin, introduction to *Himmatbahadur Birdavali*, p. v.

British. If nothing else, he will emerge in these pages as a fascinatingly complex and remarkably cunning individual—and certainly no one's image of a detached and otherworldly Indian ascetic. As I will argue, Anupgiri's pretensions to kingship can be interpreted as a growing awareness on his part of the changes overtaking the political culture of India with the rise of the Company state. Little more than a mercenary lieutenant in and around Awadh in 1750, he had evolved into a warlord and kingmaker in Delhi by the 1780s, and *virtual* king by 1795. Despite his successes, or perhaps because of them, he seems to have sensed that the days of military entrepreneurship were numbered and positioned himself accordingly. If Anupgiri was able to read the colonial handwriting on the wall, a question I pose in this article is whether he died before he could do much about it—whether, in fact, the crown he had fashioned for himself was meant to be hollow, and why.¹⁴ The beginnings of an answer, I argue, are to be found by juxtaposing the colonial record to sectarian tradition and bardic panegyrics dedicated to Anupgiri in the last decade of his life.

Bundelkhand, the setting for much of the drama that unfolds in this article, has long acted as an important geo-cultural frontier between the Gangetic north and the Deccani south. This is a fact of great significance given the importance of frontiers in the germination of identity and political-military cultures.¹⁵ Bundelkhand was well known by Anupgiri's time as the homeland of the Bundela Rajputs, an extended clan of warrior-landlords that had established itself in the region by the sixteenth century, particularly during the reign of the Mughal emperor Akbar. Since that time, and with the assistance of the Mughal emperor, the Bundelas had claimed 'kshatriya' or royal status and linked themselves to the worship of Lord Ramchandra.¹⁶ The Bundelas, however, were simply the most recent Rajput soldiering clan to dominate the region: earlier lineages that had settled in Bundelkhand included the Gaharwars and Pratihars (prior to the ninth century), the Chandels (by the twelfth century), and the Baghels (in the thirteenth century). Bundelkhand would gain added political notoriety in the eighteenth century as an arena of rising Maratha influence in the north: in the 1730s the Bundelas under Chhatrasal would ally themselves with the Peshwa, Bajirao I, and thereby establish Bundela independence

¹⁴ Nicholas Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom*, Cambridge, 1987, and the important argument that in the process of rendering Indian princes militarily dependent on the British and certifying their royal legitimacy so as to incorporate them symbolically into colonial rule, the British severed the multiple cultural and social interstices that linked society to the royal lineages, thus rendering Indian royalty politically impotent.

¹⁵ For a comparative discussion of frontiers and 'ethnogenesis' in India and Europe, see Cynthia Talbot, 'Inscribing the Other, Inscribing the Self: Hindu-Muslim Identities in Pre-Colonial India', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 37 (4), October 1995, pp. 692–722, esp. 700–10.

¹⁶ Dirk H.A. Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan, 1450–1850*, Cambridge, 1992, chapter 4, esp. pp. 120–23, 140.

from the Mughal empire; the price for Maratha assistance was one-third of Bundelkhandi dominions in the western portion of the province.¹⁷ Bundela independence, and the Rajput martial pride that fuelled it, would be undermined decisively by Anupgiri's own entrance into (and return to) the province in the 1790s. How that occurred, how the military asceticism in which Anupgiri thrived contrasted with the Rajput martial culture of Bundelkhand, and how Anupgiri would refashion himself as a result of his political and military ascendancy there, are themes to be explored in this article.

Anupgiri between Empires ..

A native speaking of him, said he was like a man who in crossing a river kept a foot in two boats, ready to abandon the one that was sinking.

Thomas Brooke

4 June 1804

There is a great deal of digging to be done before arriving at any certainties regarding Anupgiri Gosain. This fact is nowhere better reflected than in his title, 'Himmat Bahadur', which was little more than a *nom de guerre*. His 'real' name, Anupgiri Gosain, is more revealing. 'Gosain' is a generic ascetic term meaning one who is in complete control of his senses; more specifically, the title reflects his corporate identity as a *Dasnami*, or a member of India's most prominent Saiva ascetic order. 'Anup' is a common name meaning 'brilliant'; the suffix 'giri' is more significant, since it connotes his association with one of the 10 sub-categories (hence *dasnami*) of the order that has, historically, taken to arms. The name Anupgiri was bestowed upon him in his early childhood by his guru, Rajendragiri, in the 1730s. We do not know the names of his parents, nor the name they gave him.

According to Bundelkhandi lore, Anupgiri was born in Bundelkhand around 1734 into a Sanadhya Brahman family from Kulpahar village.¹⁸ Soon after his birth, his father died. His mother, left destitute, sold her two children. Anupgiri and his elder brother, who came to be known as Umraogiri, to Rajendragiri Gosain of Moth in Bundelkhand, who made them his *chelas*. We know nothing of Anupgiri's childhood and adolescence, aside from a quaint story that when not engaged in *guru-seva* (serving the guru) he spent his time playing with clay soldiers, ordering them about in

¹⁷ On the rival Rajput clans and Maratha influence in Bundelkhand, a useful summary is Tapti Roy, *The Politics of a Popular Uprising: Bundelkhand in 1857*, Delhi, 1994, pp. 78–82. For the Marathas' incursions into the north generally in the eighteenth century, see Stewart Gordon, *The Marathas, 1600–1818*, Cambridge, 1994, chapter 5.

¹⁸ The stories of Anupgiri's childhood are described by Bhagvandin, ed., in Padmakar, *Himmatbahadur Birdavali*, pp. xix–xx, see also pp. 44–45, p. 7.

mock campaigns. Consequently, it is said, Rajendragiri arranged for his martial training. Indeed, little is known of Rajendragiri himself at this time, save that he was said to have descended from a long line of Saiva gurus,¹⁹ and that in 1745 he seized by force the pargana of Moth (east of Jhansi) in Bundelkhand and came into possession of 114 villages there.²⁰ Rajendragiri would be expelled from Moth by the Maratha Naru Sankar in the late 1740s and would, by 1751, enter the service of Safdar Jang of Awadh, aiding him in defending Allahabad from the Bangash Afghans who besieged it in that year. This would mark the beginning of gosains serving under the Nawabs of Awadh and, eventually, for Anupgiri and Umraogiri, a succession of direct and indirect alliances with virtually all the major players of north Indian politics in the latter half of the century, including the Marathas Mahadji Shinde and Ali Bahadur, the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam, the Jat Prince Jawahir Singh, the Persian adventurer Najaf Khan, and, of course, the expansionist British under Governor-General Lord Wellesley.²¹

If there is a recurring theme in their careers up to 1790, it is that they not only outwitted but outlived many of the princes for whom they ostensibly worked. Perhaps because of this fact, not to mention their obscure origins, they (and particularly Anupgiri) seem to have been reviled at one time or another by almost every major political figure with whom they came into contact. Even the unorthodox appearance of their soldiers came in for severe criticism on occasion: in the Battle of Panipat (January 1761), when Shuja ud-Daula faced the Marathas, Ahmad Shah Abdali, the leader of the Durranis and Shuja's main ally, was so taken aback by the spectacle of the unclothed troopers (nagas, or 'naked' fighting ascetics) with whom he was indirectly allied, that 'He prudishly lectured Shuja on the impropriety of unrestrained kafirs, naked in front and behind . . . , parading and lounging in front of Muslims, and ordered them removed to a distance from his camp'.²²

¹⁹ Sadanandgiri, Ankargiri, Narsinghgi, Sotamgiri (of Anantpur), Bhimgiri, Santoshgiri, Sobhagiri, Narharnathgiri, Manohargiri, Chandangiri, Narayangiri, Sanathangiri, Dhyangiri. See Lala Bahadur Bhatt, 'Anupa Prakash', 1894, mss.-Hin D 9 (b), OIOC, London. If (this mss. is a rough prose version of Man Kavi, 'Anupa Prakasa', 1791-1792, mss. Hin D 9(a)).

²⁰ W. Irvine, *A History of the Bangash Nawabs of Farrukhabad, from 1713 to 1771 A.D.*, Calcutta, 1879, p. 79.

²¹ In addition to Sarkar (Roy), *A History of Dasnami Naga Sanyasis*, pp. 123-261 (based on a combination of Persian, Marathi, Hindi and English sources), a good summary (based mostly on Company correspondences) is P. N. Bhalla, 'The Gosain Brothers', *Journal of Indian History*, Vol. 23 (2), August 1944, pp. 128-36.

²² Ghulam Ali Khan Naqawi, *Imad us-Sa'adat* (Aid to bliss), Lucknow, 1864, p. 84, translated in Richard Barnett, *North India Between Empires: Awadh, the Mughals, and the British, 1720-1801*, Berkeley, 1980, pp. 56-57. Barnett notes that the directness of the original Persian does not allow a printable translation, Roy's rendering in Sarkar, *A History of the Dasnami Naga Sanyasis*, p. 158, is a tad closer to the original: 'how could the *kaffirs* have so much liberty as to walk with their things and buttocks exposed (*peashopas barhana*

A more revealing case is that of Jawahir Singh, the Jat ruler of Bharatpur who employed Anupgiri and Umraogiri in the mid-1760s. Suspecting the Gosains of intriguing with the Marathas while encamped on the banks of the Chambal in Malwa, Jawahir Singh ordered assassination attempt on Anupgiri and Umraogiri under the cover of darkness.²³ Also in the Jat service at this time, and probably responsible for poisoning Jawahir Singh's mind against the Gosains, was Ramakrishna Mahant, a powerful Vaishnava *bairagi*²⁴ commander of Jaipur and *chela* of the well-known Balanand Swami. The brothers would elude the wrath of the Jat raja and eventually have the last laugh on both Jawahir Singh and his *bairagi* commander: Anupgiri would dismantle part of a pavilion honouring the Jat king on the outskirts of the Vaishnava pilgrimage centre of Mathura and use the materials for the construction of a *ghat* at Vrindaban to commemorate his own name.²⁵ (The insult here to the Jat maharaja Jawahir Singh requires no elaboration. The affront to Ramakrishna Mahant and his *bairagis* is only discernible in the context of the acrimonious rivalry between armed Saiva and Vaishnava ascetics that, from at least the seventeenth century, had erupted into violence and bloodshed—particularly at the Kumbh assemblages held every three years at four alternating locations in the north and west.²⁶ Indeed, according to sectarian traditions connected to both Vrindaban and Galtā, near Jaipur, Vaishnava ascetics are said to have armed themselves in the first place in order to respond to attacks by Saiva ascetics in Ayodhya at the end of the seventeenth century.²⁷ Hence, the architectural contribution of the Saiva Anupgiri Gosain to the predominantly neo-Vaishnava sacred topography of the Mathura–Vrindaban region would surely have occasioned remarks.) To add injury to insult, in 1776 Anupgiri would undermine a renewed Jat–Vaishnava alliance (in the form of Naval Singh and his successor Ranjit Singh—not to be confused with the Sikh Ranjit Singh of the Punjab—and their Jat troopers, on the one hand, and Swami Balanand and his 12,000 *bairagi* soldiers, on the other) by attaching himself to the rising star of the Persian adventurer Najaf Khan in Delhi, who was gaining in influence with and control over the Mughal emperor, Shah Alam. Since 1773, Najaf had been engaged in a series of

kardah) before the Moslems'. In any case, the Gosains did in fact comply with Abdali's request, moved their tents to a polite distance, and, notwithstanding the Durrani affront, acquitted themselves well on the battlefield

²³ See Roy in Sarkar, *A History of the Dasnami Naga Sanyasis*, pp. 174–75

²⁴ An ascetic term describing Vaishnavas, analogous to *gosain*, meaning 'bereft of emotion'.

²⁵ See F.S. Growse, *Mathura. A District Memoir*, 1882, rpt New Delhi, 1993, pp. 307–8

²⁶ See James Lochtefeld, 'The Vishva Hindu Parishad and the Roots of Hindu Militancy', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 42 (2), Summer 1994, pp. 593–98; and Pinch, 'Soldier Monks and Militant Sadhus', pp. 154–56

²⁷ See Richard Burghart, 'The Founding of the Ramanandi Sect', *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 25 (2), Spring, 1978, p. 130

protracted engagements in and around Dig against Naval Singh and Swami Balanand; Anupgiri's arrival in the Delhi-Dig environs with his massive *naga* force (estimated now at about 20,000 horse and foot) would tilt the scales in this war decidedly in Najaf's favour, both vis-à-vis the Jats and with respect to imperial politics. More importantly, for the Gosain, 'as the star of Anupgiri rose, that of Balanand set'.²⁸

The prominent Maratha general Mahadji Shinde would likewise learn to hate Anupgiri with a passion, despite the considerable services the Gosain performed on his behalf in the mid-1780s by introducing the Maratha into Delhi affairs and supporting his eventual ascendancy over the Mughal emperor, Shah Alam.²⁹ By early 1786 Shinde was accusing Anupgiri of plotting with his enemies in Aligarh and Agra; in the summer of 1789 the Maratha would accuse the Gosain of attempting to murder him.³⁰ Earlier that year, Shinde had developed a slight fever with swelling in the face and neck, all apparently brought on by malignant boils. By late June he was in extreme pain, and a conference of physicians determined that the cause of the disease was diabolical. Suspicion fell on Anupgiri after a woman of Vrindaban was overheard to boast to her friends that 'Sindhia's illness was the triumph of her witchcraft, and that she had practised it at the instigation of Himmatt Bahadur Gosain's agents'. The woman was brought to Shinde's court, admitted her guilt, and performed 'the magical rites for counteracting the mischief already done, and lo! it had immediate effect in decreasing Sindhia's pain'—thus confirming the charge against Anupgiri and his agents. Shinde, enraged at the Gosain's diabolical act, immediately dispatched officers to bring Anupgiri to the darbar. Anupgiri escaped from Shinde's guards and took refuge under the banner of Ali Bahadur, then encamped near Mathura. For his part, Ali Bahadur had been little more than a titular representative of the Peshwa in the north; now, recognising the opportunity that confronted him in the form of an alliance with the Gosain and his numerous soldiery, he obliged Anupgiri's request for diplomatic protection. Matters remained thus until January 1790, with

²⁸ On Anupgiri's alliance with Najaf Khan and its ramifications for the Jats and Balanand, see Sarkar (Roy), *A History of Dasnami Naga Sanyasis*, pp. 187–93 (the quote is from p. 193). According to Roy, Balanand 'quitted the service of the Jat Rajah presumably after the fall of Dig and entered the service of the Jaipure State'. The account here is confused somewhat by the tendency of the author to refer to both Anupgiri and Balanand's followers as 'Gosains'.

²⁹ Sarkar (Roy), *A History of Dasnami Naga Sanyasis*, pp. 207–48, and Bhalla, 'The Gosain Brothers'. This would follow Najaf's death in 1782. The swirl of intrigue and political murder that overtook the Delhi court during the next two-and-a-half years, as the Company envoy, James Browne and Shinde (with whom Anupgiri was allied) vied for the mantle of Mughal authority, would eventually conclude with Shinde being appointed regent to the Mughal emperor in late 1784, thus handing the Company a bitter diplomatic and military defeat just when victory appeared assured.

³⁰ Described in Sarkar (Roy), *A History of Dasnami Naga Sanyasis*, pp. 249–52; and Sarkar, *Fall of the Mughal Empire*, Vol. 4, Delhi, 1992, pp. 7–11.

Anupgiri and 300 of his followers—'all desperate fighters, being Naga monks of the Rajendragiri type'—ensconced in Ali Bahadur's camp, and Anupgiri's 'concubines and children' and 300 armed nagas detained as prisoners in Shinde's camp. The Peshwa would issue his opinion that Anupgiri be held in Jhansi fort and his properties administered by the Maratha state, but not by Shinde, until such good conduct recommended leniency. Finally, in February 1790, Shinde was compelled to relent and pardon the Gosain of all offences.

The notoriety of Anupgiri and his brother guaranteed that their British contemporaries had few kind words to say about them. For example, John Bristowe, the Resident at the court of Lucknow from 1775 to 1783, lost no opportunity in turning the young Awadh Nawab, Asaf ud-Daula, against the Gosains, despite (or, given the dynamics of the subsidiary alliance, precisely because of) the fact that the Gosains constituted an important component of the Awadhi army.³¹ James Browne, Hastings' envoy to the Mughal emperor Shah Alam in the mid-1780s, took an even stronger disliking to Anupgiri, distrusting him so completely that he deputed two spies to observe and report on the Gosain's every movement and conversation.³² Similarly, Anderson, the Resident with Mahadji Shinde in 1784–85, when Shinde was introducing himself into north Indian politics around Delhi, viewed any attachment on his part with Anupgiri in the most negative terms and expressed himself to Shinde accordingly.³³ English distrust of Anupgiri is best captured, however, in the private letters of Thomas Brooke, second judge of the Court of Appeal in Banaras, to Major M. Shawe, Secretary to Lord Wellesley, in 1804. Brooke fancied himself an amateur spymaster and dabbled in local intelligence gathering;³⁴ he very much sought to ingratiate himself with the Governor-General by offering up through Shawe advice on Bundelkhandi affairs, emphasising in particular his dim view of Anupgiri (notwithstanding the fact that the Company had already joined forces with the Gosain in Bundelkhand in the previous year). In a letter of 4 June 1804, unaware of the Gosain's death on the previous day, he observed:

³¹ Letters from Bristowe to Calcutta, received 24 July (undated), 11 September (dated 22 August), 8 November (dated 11 October), and 20 November (dated 4 November) 1775, *Bengal Secret and Military Consultations* (hereafter BSMC), OIOC, serve as sufficient examples. On the political and military dimensions of the relationship with the British residents at this time, see Barnett, *North India Between Empires*, chapters 3 and 4.

³² Bhalla, 'The Gosain Brothers', p. 130. Bhalla notes Hastings' own cognisance of Browne's distrust of Anupgiri, and the extent to which that distrust invariably tainted the intelligence that his envoy transmitted to Calcutta.

³³ See, in particular, Anderson to Hastings, received 19 February (dated 1 February) 1785, BSMC, cf. Bhalla, 'The Gosain Brothers', p. 131.

³⁴ C.A. Bayly remarks that Brooke 'was given to superabundant conspiracy theories' and describes how on one occasion he was duped by an Indian informant seeking to garner rewards for fabricated information. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870*, Cambridge, 1996, p. 148.

Himmat Behadur is not to be trusted, by the inhabitants of every class he is detested, and whilst he stays in Bundelcund we can never prosper. A native speaking of him, said he was like a man who in crossing a river kept a foot in two boats, ready to abandon the one that was sinking. I suspect him as being the cause which has given the *Kiladar* [fort commander] of Calinger dissatisfaction. He finds it I believe profitable to fish in troubled waters; were all at peace, the nature of his jagheer might be enquired into. I am misinformed if it does not exceed by the double his estimation of it.³⁵

The censorious view of Anupgiri evinced by Indian and British observers has seeped into twentieth-century writing on the Gosain's exploits. Jadunath Sarkar, in his *Fall of the Mughal Empire*, resorted to such terms as 'faithless', 'unscrupulous', and 'selfish' to describe him; he was even content to assert that 'Himmat Bahadur lacked personal courage and bore a low character for his faithfulness [*sic*] and love of secret intrigue'. Remarking on Anupgiri's reaction to being brushed aside by Shinde in 1785–86 after the Gosain's usefulness had run its course in inserting the Maratha into Delhi politics, Sarkar notes: 'He [Anupgiri] began to spit venom in his rage and vexation and tried his sole weapon of treachery and intrigue for regaining his ascendancy in the state by spiting Sindhia'.³⁶ Even the more sympathetic P.N. Bhalla (1944) and Nirad Bhushan Roy (1958) felt compelled to apologise in their narratives for the 'lack of loyalty or fidelity' for which the Gosains were 'notorious'.³⁷ In their defence, however, the moments when the Gosains seemed to succumb to treacherous impulses can easily be interpreted in their favour as responses in kind to acts of bad faith on the part of their employer-patrons. Their disaffection from Awadh in 1775–76 was the result of Bristowe's influence over the new and inexperienced Nawab, Asaf ud-Daula; the 'venom' which Anupgiri 'spat' after being brushed aside by Shinde in 1785–86 was understandable given that the Maratha's ascendancy in Delhi affairs was primarily attributable to Anupgiri's indefatigable efforts in the previous two years; and Anupgiri's decision to ally with the British in Bundelkhand after Ali Bahadur's death in 1802 can easily be understood as the result of his own

³⁵ *Correspondence of Thomas Brooke at Benares with Major M. Shawe, Secretary to Lord Wellesley, 1803–1805*, British Library, Department of Manuscripts, Add. Ms 37, 281, ff. 228b–229f. Though he uses the term 'jagheer', Brooke refers to Anupgiri's Bundelkhandi *jaiddad* (the right to collect revenues for the maintenance of troops) of 22 lakh rupees. See below, pp. 323–24.

³⁶ Sarkar, *Fall of the Mughal Empire*, Vol. III, pp. 190–91. Sarkar's dim view of Anupgiri also reflects the Marathi and Persian sources upon which much of his magnum opus is based, which were written from the perspective of Anupgiri's employers who, to a man, sought to manipulate the Gosain but were themselves manipulated by him.

³⁷ The quote is from Bhalla, 'The Gosain Brothers', p. 135, but the sentiment is pervasive as well in Sarkar (Roy), *History of the Dasnami Naga Sanyasis*.

well-founded apprehensions of Maratha intentions once the Peshwa's protection (in the form of Ali Bahadur) was no longer available; not to mention his own calculations of the inevitability of British supremacy following the signing of the Treaty of Bassein by the Maratha Peshwa in late December of 1802.

The sanctimonious condemnation levelled at Anupgiri over the centuries contrasts sharply with the fact that all the major actors in north Indian affairs, including the British, sought alliance with him. Clearly, Anupgiri and his naga army had much to offer a potential ally. One characteristic that recommended the Gosain was the high quality of his naga horse and foot and their willingness to take inordinate risks in battle. This fact emerges time and again in Sarkar and Roy's blow-by-blow account of the exploits of Rajendragiri and his disciples: in 1751, when the Gosains came to the relief of the besieged Safdar Jang and set out on daily raids mounted on 'excellent mares' to cause havoc in the Afghan camps; again in 1759, when Anupgiri and Umraogiri mounted a surprise night attack that devastated a large, predatory Maratha encampment in Rohilkhand; again in 1764 when, in the service of the Jat raja, Jawahir Singh, Anupgiri led a band of guerrilla infantry armed to the teeth into Delhi so that they could mount a covering artillery fire under which his naga cavalry could enter the city.³⁸ When the nagas fought surprise attacks at close quarters and at night that they seemed most successful; by contrast, when they were involved in contests that pitted massive armies arrayed against each other on an open plain in the light of day, the Gosains fared poorly—in part because allied armies were as likely as not to engage in treacherous behaviour when the Gosains were in the picture. Prominent examples of the latter include Rajendragiri's defeat by Afghan forces at Chilkiya in 1752, Anupgiri's defeat by Hindupat at Tindwari in Bundelkhand in 1762, and again Anupgiri's failure to break through the English lines at Buxar in 1764.³⁹ Whether on horseback or on foot, nagas were employed to best advantage as guerrilla soldiers and in small, surprise early morning raids over city walls and into enemy encampments. Such service conformed well to hierarchy of the *akharas*, where hundreds and even thousands of men were inculcated from youth in the merits of complete loyalty to the guru according to abject servitude implicit in the guru-*chela* relationship.⁴⁰ These

³⁸ Sarkar (Roy), *History of the Dasnami Naga Sanyasis*, pp 127–28, 156–57, 171–72.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp 133–36, 161–62, 164–65. It would appear that Anupgiri was aware of the tactical deficiency of his forces, since he would engage in the 1790s with a European adventurer, John Mieselbach, to train his infantry according to European drill [return to this point later].

⁴⁰ An ethic of servitude was not restricted to Gosains and nagas: see Jos Gommans' recent description of the *ghulam-shahi* (royal slave) component of the Durrani Afghan army in the eighteenth century, in 'Indian Warfare and Afghan Innovation during the Eighteenth Century', *Studies in History*, n.s., Vol 11 (2), 1995, pp 270–73.

ties of monastic loyalty were institutionalised in a military chain of command for small tactical units, with the guru as overall field commander and his *chelas* the loyal inner circle of lieutenant-soldiers. These factors combined to give gosains a good reputation in the Indian military labour market in the early nineteenth century, despite their stigmatisation in Bengal in the previous century as 'vagrants and plunderers'. Lieutenant-Colonel Valentine Blacker, reflecting on the rise of infantry forces in India in the 1700s, described gosains as 'a Hindoo cast of peculiar habits, *scattered over different parts of India*', and ranked them as 'good troops', just below the ultra-elite Arabs and Sindhis and on a par with Rohilla Afghans, Jats, and *khalsa* (military) Sikhs.⁴¹

Another feature Anupgiri could bring to bear in attracting allies was in what British officials would deride as 'intrigue'. He possessed a seemingly endless supply of intelligence and his abilities as a diplomat, go-between, and a negotiator of payments to avoid military confrontation were proverbial; in fact, he was emblematic of the class of men described by Kolff that constituted the grease between the cumbersome gears of the alliance-seeking states.⁴² He was employed repeatedly in this regard by Shuja in overtures to Shinde in the early 1770s, and by Najaf in negotiations with various Jat clans and Jaipur in the late 1770s and early 1780s. By the mid-1780s, following Najaf's death, he began bringing these talents to the fore as a free agent in and around Delhi, eventually facilitating Shinde's own ascendancy with the Mughal emperor. Anupgiri's ready access to intelligence is not surprising since he was, by virtue of his *Dasnami* status, institutionally tied to a web of monastic institutions that criss-crossed the subcontinent—a glimpse of the depth and breadth of which, for Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh, can be had from Francis Buchanan's extensive surveys of those territories in the early nineteenth century.⁴³ His expertise in this area brings to mind the well-worn advice of Kautilya in his treatise on statecraft, namely, that the king should concern himself first and foremost with the acquisition of intelligence, and avail himself of spies from a wide array of

⁴¹ *Memoir of the Operations of the British Army in India, During the Mahratta War of 1817, 1818, & 1819*, London, 1821. Emphasis added.

⁴² These were talents that he perfected in Najaf Khan's service, which served him well in the treacherous political and diplomatic landscape of the Delhi-Agra-Jaipur triangle in the late 1770s and early 1780s. See e.g., Sarkar (Roy), *History of the Dasnami Naga Sanyasis*, pp. 193–206. See also D.H.A. Kolff, 'The End of an Ancien Régime: Colonial War in India, 1798–1818', in J.A. de Moor and H.L. Wesseling, eds., *Imperialism and War: Essays on Colonial Wars in Asia and Africa*, Leiden, 1989, esp. pp. 45–46; for comparisons to Europe, see the discussion in Gommans, 'Indian Warfare', pp. 279–80.

⁴³ See, for example, *An Account of the Districts of Bihar and Patna, 1811–1812*, Vol. 1, Patna, 1934, pp. 57–262; *An Account of the District of Shahabad, 1812–1813*, Patna, 1934, pp. 51–151; and 'An account of the Northern Part of the District of Gorakhpur, 1812', *Mss. Eur. D. 91–92*, Indian Office Library and Records, London, pp. 139–345. Given the dates for the Shahabad account, the true dates for Gorakhpur are probably 1813–1814.

occupational walks of life, including especially, ascetics.⁴⁴ The monastic information web had proved useful in facilitating trade and banking in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, so that some of the most influential trader-financiers of the Gangetic north by 1780 were gosains with soldiering connections.⁴⁵ Significantly, Gosain traders in the eighteenth century were perceived as a 'neutral' or non-aligned group that served to maintain the subcontinental flow of capital despite the emergence of the regional polities that were inheriting the mantle of Mughal rule. So adept were Gosains in commerce, and so far-reaching their intelligence, that Hastings relied upon them in attempting to massage trading connections with Tibetans in Central Asia in the 1780s.⁴⁶

Gosain Military Entrepreneurship on the Imperial Frontier

Nagas [are] a description of rogues who from going quite naked [,] close shaved and well rubbed with oil are so slippery that no one can seize them while they force their way with a dagger pointed at both ends and held by the middle.

Francis Buchanan, 1808⁴⁷

An excellent picture of Anupgiri's operational style can be glimpsed from Bristowe's letters to Hastings and the Calcutta Secret Committee in 1775–1776, a period when the Gosains were, largely as a result of Bristowe's influence in Lucknow, being manoeuvred out of the Nawab's service. Shuja had died early in 1775 and Asaf was under greater obligation to the British Resident and troops than his father had been. In 1775, the Gosains

⁴⁴ Kautilya, *Arthashastra*, Mysore, 1929, esp. pp. 17–22, 159. That that advice was heeded well into the nineteenth century, and even by the British (who came to fear more than value them), is clear from Bayly's recent study, *Empire and Information*, esp. pp. 69, 101–2, 106, 147, 194, 319–20.

⁴⁵ The relevant arguments here are well known. Cohn ('The Role of the Gosains') notes that the privileged status of Gosains and their command of subcontinental pilgrimage routes enabled them to extend and diversify their institutional (monasterial) savings into urban landownership, moneylending, and trade in luxury goods in urban centres throughout the north. Kolff ('Sanyasi trader-soldiers') extends Cohn's argument to suggest that the monastic-business networks were also effective in supporting naga soldiering. Bayly (*Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, esp. pp. 125–44), building on these arguments, emphasises the importance of military-trader ascetic orders in facilitating commercial and financial links between the increasingly regional political economies of the eighteenth century. See also the discussion in Dasgupta, *Fakir and Sannyasi Uprisings*, pp. 24–27.

⁴⁶ Sushobhan C Sarkar, 'A Note on Puran Giri Gosain', *Bengal Past & Present*, Vol. 43, April–June 1932, pp. 83–87; see also Jonathan Duncan, 'An Account of Two Fakeers, with their Portraits', *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. 5, 1808, pp. 45–46.

⁴⁷ Buchanan's Dinajpur Account, in R. Montgomery Martin, *The History, Antiquities Topography, and Statistics of Eastern India*, Vol. 2, London, 1838, p. 517.

captured much of western Bundelkhand from the Marathas, from Kalpi to as far as Konch and Jhansi, yielding about 11 lakh rupees of revenue. Since they were already obliged to the Nawab for a large portion of Doab revenues, this latter conquest raised the total responsibility of the Gosains to the treasury to somewhere between 25 lakh and 27 lakh rupees, which the Nawab would reduce in early 1776 to 18 lakh in lieu of payment of troops. In August 1775, Anupgiri made an overture to Hastings through Bristowe, seeking an alliance and diplomatic protection. During an interview at that time between Bristowe and Anupgiri's *vakil* or representative, the Gosain probed the possible British response if he were to become an independent force—particularly whether the Company would afford political insulation from the Awadh Nawab. In response to pointed questioning, the *vakil* informed Bristowe that 'his master consider'd himself independent and, as he has a large body of men of his own caste under his command . . . his excellency [the Nawab] could not of himself reduce him'.⁴⁸

By October, Anupgiri had taken to discountenancing altogether the authority of passports issued by the Nawab for travel through the Doab districts, and instead respected only those written by Najaf Khan; again, Anupgiri (through his *vakil*) made renewed representations of friendship to Bristowe, which Bristowe rebuffed in short order. Not surprisingly, Anupgiri avoided Lucknow and Faizabad; Umraogiri, by contrast, paid Bristowe a personal visit there and repeated the overtures of alliance that his younger brother had made through his *vakil* in August. Umraogiri's phrasing, paraphrased by Bristowe, is revealing: '[Umraogiri] desired me not to look upon him as upon the other officers of the nabob's government for he was no *Motteseddy* [clerk, bureaucrat] but a soldier . . . [H]e considered himself obliged to his sword for everything he held'. By this time, the Gosains had about 10,000 horse and 9,000 foot in their pay; more importantly, they were making preparations to bolster those numbers, fortify their positions and win over the local notables in their districts to their cause. According to Bristowe, they were 'daily collecting together ammunition, entertaining new troops, using their best endeavours to attach the Rana of Goad, the Rajas of Bundelcund and all the petty Rajas in the neighbourhood to their interest'. The means by which they were attaching the local 'petty rajas' to their interest was by demanding very low rents or no rent at all from the fall harvests, a tactic which Bristowe felt would surely produce positive results for the Gosains. By December they were storing ammunition in forts in Bundelkhand, particularly Moth, their childhood home in the time of their guru, Rajendragiri.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Bristowe to the Board, letters received 24 July 1775 (undated), 11 September 1775 (dated 22 August 1775), 8 January 1776 (dated 13 December 1775), and 8 April 1776 (dated 1 March 1776), BSMC.

⁴⁹ See Bristowe to the Board, letters received 8 November 1775 (dated 11 October 1775) and 8 January 1776 (dated 13 December 1775), BSMC.

By February 1776, Bristowe was lamenting the fact that the Nawab had not dismissed the Gosains earlier and put loyal men in charge of the revenues of their districts—though precisely how the Nawab would have gone about this task is difficult to imagine given the general disarray of his forces at the time. In any event, Bristowe feared that ‘the *rubby* [winter–spring] harvest will be collected by the Gofseynes and not a single rupee [will] come into the nabob’s treasury’. At this point the Nawab, now encamped at Etawa in a show of force, agreed to reduce the revenue demand to 18 lakh rupees instead of 27 lakh rupees, allowing only slightly more than half of the Gosains’ claim that they had advanced fully 17 lakh rupees to the troops under their charge. Bristowe also noted, importantly, that ‘the army of the Gofseynes is near Jansy, [and] they have on the spot not above seven or eight hundred horse and troop’—a significant reduction from the 19,000 cavalry and foot soldiers in the Gosains’ employ only six months earlier. The whereabouts of the remainder of their troops becomes clear in Bristowe’s next major correspondence on the subject of the Gosains, dated 1 March: the Resident reported that not only had the Gosains paid to date only the meagre sum of one lakh rupees to the treasury, but their ‘agents’ had occupied the many small forts that dotted the region and refused to relinquish them despite orders to that effect by the Nawab and despite Anupgiri and Umraogiri’s attendance on the Nawab at the time. Once the rabi revenues were collected (but not paid into the treasury), the Gosains withdrew all their troops and artillery, and treasure, from the Bundelkhand forts and made preparations to assemble at a location unknown. Bristowe speculated that Etawa was their destination and had heard a rumour that 5,000 were at a place called Akary; he observed that in fact 1,500 soldiers joined the brothers at Etawa in the previous week and that they were armed and ready for action in case of a preemptory attack by the Nawab himself.⁵⁰

By early April Anupgiri dispensed with the charade of loyalty to the young Nawab: he abandoned his Bundelkhand and Doab districts and openly joined forces with Najaf Khan who was laying siege to the Jat fortress at Dig near Bharatpur. With him he took ‘near 9,000 men of the *Seneass* [sanyasi] and other Hindoo castes’ [*sic*]. Bristowe would opine, characteristically, that ‘Nudjif Cawn will have little to boast of from the acquisition of the Gossaine, who has never served a prince whom he did not betray’. (Contrary to Bristowe’s opinion, Anupgiri would remain loyal to Najaf up to the time of the Persian adventurer’s death in 1782.) Meanwhile, Umraogiri was still encamped near the Nawab at Etawa, and had with him between 3,000–4,000 men; they would soon follow Anupgiri (together with Anupgiri’s force, then, there were according to Bristowe’s intelligence at maximum 13,000 men under the Gosains’ command). By

⁵⁰ Bristowe to the Board, letters received 7 February 1776 (dated 26 January 1776) and 8 April 1776 (dated 1 March 1776), BSMC.

late May it was clear to Bristowe that Anupgiri was using the revenues he had collected from his lately abandoned districts to cement his relationship with the cash-poor Najaf Khan, whose troops were rebellious for want of pay. In exchange, Najaf granted Anupgiri 'certain lands' in the vicinity of Agra yielding 12 lakh rupees. In mid-June, Bristowe reported that 'The Gossaynes may have about twenty thousand men with him, out of whom about four thousand are cavalry, six thousand *sinassies* [sanyasis] armed with nothing but spears and *tulwars* [swords], and the rest matchlockmen'.⁵¹

There are several points of interest in the above chronology. First, note should be taken of the varying strength of the Gosains' forces between late 1775 and mid-1776. They begin with about 19,000 troops, most of whom they employ to collect the rabi revenue in their Doab and Bundelkhand districts, keeping less than 1,000 men for their personal guard. Then, as soon as the collections are complete, around late March, the troops begin to withdraw from the districts and reassemble; by early April Anupgiri sets off with 9,000 men 'of the *Sancass* and other Hindoo casts'; Umraogiri has with him only three or four thousand. By mid-June, however, their force is back up to about 20,000 again, 6,000 of whom are 'poorly' armed sanyasis. What is interesting about these figures is (a) that they vary so markedly around harvest schedules, reflecting no doubt the high degree of permeability between soldiering and cultivation noted by Kolff;⁵² and (b) that they seem to suggest that not all the men under Anupgiri and Umraogiri's command were sanyasis as such, that is, directly connected to the Dasnami command structure as sanyasis or gosains. This emerges with particular clarity in the remark by Bristowe that Anupgiri had set off for Dig with 9,000 men of 'the *Sancass* and other Hindoo casts'. It is possible to speculate, given Bristowe's use of the term 'Hindu', that the Gosains were limited in recruitment to non-Muslim soldiers since, by the late eighteenth century, the obligations of faith may have presented an obstacle for Muslim recruits in respecting the command hierarchy and military culture of the *akhara*.⁵³ Such a speculation is supported by Ahmad Shah Abdali's outburst before the Battle of Panipat (1761) that the nagas and gosains with whom he was indirectly allied were little more than 'naked kafirs' whose proximity in camp—'lounging in front of Muslims'—he could not tolerate. By contrast, the significance of soldier of the 'Hindoo casts' noted by Bristowe is not necessarily that they shared a set of religious beliefs with the Gosains, but that they were not Muslim and hence not subject to the potential objections

⁵¹ Bristowe to the Board, letters received 22 April 1776 (dated 9 April 1776), 13 June 1776 (dated 30 May 1776), and 8 July 1776 (dated 10 June 1776), BSMC

⁵² Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy*, esp. pp. 3–17.

⁵³ See, in particular, C.A. Bayly, 'The Pre-history of "Communalism?" Religious Conflict in India, 1700–1860', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 19 (2), 1985, pp. 177–203, and cf. his *Empire and Information*, ch. 5, 'The Indian Ecumene: An Indigenous Public Sphere', for the pre-prehistory of this issue, see Talbot, 'Inscribing the Other, Inscribing the Self'.

that might emerge when being compelled to serve alongside naked or near-naked naga soldiers.⁵⁴ In any case, the tendency to recruit locally and put soldiers in the field who were not formally connected to the ascetic order continued up to the time of Anupgiri's death.

Second, given our earlier discussion of the tactical strengths and weakness of Anupgiri and Umraogiri's armies, one begins to perceive a kind of military hierarchy with respect to gosains and nagas (Bristowe's use of the term 'sanyasi' for naga is most likely due to the greater currency of the former to describe the 'predatory bands' of armed Saiva ascetics in Company Bengal after 1760)—the former (gosains) representing what might be considered a higher status officer corps, the latter (nagas) constituting the rank-and-file troopers under gosain command. In this sense, we may refine our original definition of Gosain, 'in control of the senses' (and, for that matter, the Vaishnava 'bairagi', earlier defined as 'bereft of emotion') to refer in a martial sense to a comprehensive physical and mental discipline required for an officer to make command decisions under the extreme duress of battle. Likewise naga, which is usually interpreted as 'naked', is better understood to connote the culture and process of self-abnegation required to transform an individual recruit into an effective and unself-conscious member of a military regiment—whether infantry or cavalry.⁵⁵ (The same idea could be applied to term generally employed, as noted above, to designate armed soldier ascetics in Bengal, 'sanyasi', or 'one who renounces'.) This should not obscure the fact that nakedness or near-nakedness facilitated a system of hand-to-hand combat at which, I have suggested above, nagas excelled.

Third, emphasis should be placed on the language that Umraogiri used to describe himself at this time, which held for Anupgiri as well, namely, that 'he was no Motteseddy but a soldier' and that 'he considered himself obliged to his sword for everything he held'. Increasingly in the eighteenth century, the multiple strands of state service in India were bound to, or at least expressed in terms of, closed caste identities—for example, as Brāhman, Khatri, Rajput or Kayastha. Umraogiri's assertion suggests that the Gosains understood themselves to be not simply above bureaucratic service, but consciously and avowedly beyond simple caste categorisation. To be a

⁵⁴ The importance of the soldiering context should be emphasised here: for the contrast with earlier centuries, see Talbot, 'Inscribing the Other', esp. pp. 704–10. Anupgiri did in fact include Muslims in his entourage, most notably his wife at the time of his death, Fakhr-un-Nissa Begam, and his long-term associate and advisor on legal, financial, and political matters, Waja-ud-din Khan. However, relatively little is known about either of these individuals.

⁵⁵ On the different levels of discipline and self-negation necessary to wage war effectively through the ages, see John Keegan, *The Face of Battle*, London, 1976. Also useful, on global historical dimensions of pre- and proto-modern infantry training, is the introduction to David B. Ralston, *Importing the European Army: The Introduction of European Military Techniques and Institutions into the Extra-European World, 1600–1914*, Chicago, 1990.

soldiering gosain was to be dependent on the sword only—akin, to Sikh and Maratha identity in the early eighteenth century, or Afghan and Rajput identity in the sixteenth century.⁵⁶ The Khalsa Sikh commitment to the symbol of the sword as a core component of community identity from 1699 onward is suggestive in this regard.⁵⁷ Not unlike the institutionalisation of arms in the Nanakpanth, the Gosain military culture that generated this supra-caste identity was determined not by the traditions of biological forebears, but by virtue of the monastic and martial disciplines that were inherited when Anupgiri and Umraogiri were sold as children to Rajendra-giri.

The Monk Who Would Be King?

From 1789 to 1802 Anupgiri was allied to the Maratha adventurer, Ali Bahadur; during that time, they would devote themselves fully to the conquest of Bundelkhand. In addition to being the place where Anupgiri began his military-ascetic career, Bundelkhand was home to the Rajput descendants of Chhatrasal, who had thrown off the Mughal yoke and established, with Maratha aid, Bundela independence in the early eighteenth century.⁵⁸ As a result of Maratha assistance, Chhatrasal is said to have made over fully one-third of the province (the western portion including Jhansi, Moth and Kalpi) to Maratha overlords. Over the course of the century, and during the 1770s and 1780s in particular, infighting between the various Rajput lines that descended from Chhatrasal, and between the various Maratha clans descended from Baji Rao's generals who exercised a claim on Bundelkhandi revenues, and between the Marathas and the Bundelas generally, rendered Bundelkhand one of the most factionally riven provinces of the subcontinent (and given subcontinental politics in this period, this says a great deal). The peak of this infighting occurred in 1784, when nearly all the main Rajput lineage groups were arrayed into

⁵⁶ An important point here is that while individuals seem to have been able to adopt the mantles 'Afghan' or 'Rajput' or 'Maratha' (and the religious culture that went with those identities) with relative ease in the period before about 1700, after that date such terms gained political potency because they invoked increasingly elite, closed, military professional identities that could only be reproduced biologically. In addition to Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy*, see Jos Gommans, *The Rise of the Indo-Afghan Empire, c. 1710–1780*, Leiden, 1994, and Gordon, *The Marathas*.

⁵⁷ W.H. McLeod, *The Evolution of the Sikh Community*, Delhi, 1975, p. 13, observes that for Guru Gobind Singh (d. 1708) 'the characteristic name of God was *sarab-loh*, the "All-Steel"', and it is no accident that in the preparation for Sikh baptism the baptismal water is stirred with a two-edged sword. See also the many references to the sword in *Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism*, ed. W.H. McLeod, Manchester, 1984, and, more generally, Lorenzen, 'Warrior Ascetics', for a theorisation of the genesis of the Sikh *khalsa* or 'army of the pure' in the seventeenth century as a phase of armed asceticism in Indian history.

⁵⁸ A concise summary of this period is given in 'Papers Relative to Bundelkhand', British Library, Add. Mss. 13,591, 1f-9f.

two parties and faced each other at the Battle of Gathyaura (three miles east of Chhatrapur). In Bundeli folklore, this moment is often referred to as the Mahabharata of Bundelkhand, and is said to have been so ferocious as to have deprived the province of most of its brave warriors. A Rajput commander named Arjun Singh would emerge victorious in that contest. But despite that victory, and despite the fact that the province was pitted with gullies and ravines and dotted with massive fortresses set on rugged hillocks, most notably those of Jhansi in the west and Kalinjar in the east, the way was now open for the major subcontinental powers—namely, the Marathas and the English—to make serious inroads into Bundelkhand. With Anupgiri and Ali Bahadur's entry into the province in 1790, it appeared the Maratha Peshwa was making his move.

Anupgiri had faced the Rajput clans of Bundelkhand once before in his career, in 1762, when, while in the service of Shuja, he was soundly defeated by the forces united under Hindupat and chased out of the province. For a brief time in the 1770s he gained control of a large portion of western Bundelkhand, but this was wrested from Maratha overlords. Anupgiri's re-entry into Bundelkhand with Ali Bahadur in 1790 brought him into direct conflict, for the second time, with the Bundela Rajput chieftains of that province. His second try was more successful than the first: in 1792 he defeated the pride of the Bundela Rajputs in Bundelkhand, Arjun Singh, the guardian of Bhakta Singh (a descendant of Chhatrasal) and commanding general of his army.⁵⁹ The victory was all the more significant in that it was Arjun Singh who had commanded the army under Hindupat (and Ghuman Singh) which had handed Anupgiri his inglorious defeat in 1762.

For Anupgiri the victory against Arjun Singh was more than strategically important: it was the moment that enabled him (and others) to begin referring to himself as 'Maharaja'. This is reflected in the bardic poetry describing Anupgiri and his victory in 1792. The battle against Arjun Singh was commemorated in verse by Padmakar (the *nom de plume* of Pyarelal Bhatt), who would become, in later years, a well-known *rasika* poet of Bundelkhand, Mathura-Vrindaban, and eastern Rajasthan.⁶⁰ The epic

⁵⁹ Bhagvandin, the editor of *Himmatbahadur Birdavali*, claims (p. xxxi) that Arjun Singh was a Panwar Rajput, which could mean that he was a member of the dominant Panwar lineage centered in Ujjain and Malwa and heir to what Kolff calls the Rajput 'great tradition', or that he belonged to the less prestigious Panwar subgrouping within the extended Bundela clan. See Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy*, pp. 59, 121. The latter seems more likely, given that Arjun Singh's father was born and raised in northern Bundelkhand (Bhagvandin in *Himmatbahadur Birdavali*, p. xxxi). In either case, the ethnographic marker would have signified a proud military heritage.

⁶⁰ On the *rasika*, or 'school of sweet devotion', genre, see Bhagwati Prasad Sinha, *Ram Bhakti Mein Rasika Sampraday* (The Rasika Sampraday in Ram Worship), Balrampur, 1957; and Philip Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text: Performing the Ramcaritmanas of Tulsidas*, Berkeley, 1991, pp. 310–21.

poem he composed after the battle, entitled *Himmatbahadur Birdavali* (roughly translatable as 'Ode to the Bravery of Himmat Bahadur'), was Padmakar's first major work and praised Anupgiri as a universal world conqueror or *Chakravartin*:

Himmat Bahadur is a great king, incomparable in his excellent benevolence.

He is generous, brave and compassionate, [but] to his amassed enemies he is death itself.

He humiliates his enemies and scorches them in their jungle hideaways. He shows his long-armed compassion for the poor during religious sacrifices.

He gives endowments to support dharma, and is the clothing that covers Hindu shame.

He is the embodiment of radiant splendour, but an insatiable demon when his anger is provoked.

He is as true to his word as Harishchandra, [and] is ever the source of bliss.

He is the enemy of sadness, constantly engaged in sacrificial rites.

The lamp of his own sect blazes radiantly, [he is] the most valiant protector of the earth.

To the class of poets he is like the sun to the lotus, [and] is full of benign moral conduct.

He is extremely knowledgeable, [and] always puts forth a serene countenance.

When he sees the needy he is compassionate, when destroying evil he is merciless.

He is a remarkable horseman and an unsurpassed archer.

He chants Siva bhajans with such excellence and equanimity—no one can compare.

Himmat Bahadur is a powerful king, his army's presence immediately destroys his foe.

His occupation is world conquest, he is notorious in the lands of his enemies.

And after briefly describing the Rajput army, Padmakar returned to the praise of Anupgiri:

Now I'll sing of an army that all the *Thakurs* [Rajput landlords] have heard of.

Near the massive Ajaygarh fort, united they are fearsome.

Whence the conch shell is blown, [can be seen] his mighty sword.
The incessant beat of the kettledrum scatters his enemies like so many snorting pigs.⁶¹

The tone is unmistakable: Padmakar, in seeking the patronage of Anupgiri, described him not as a mercenary adventurer but as a great and benevolent monarch—a style of panegyric normally reserved for the Rajput chieftains of the province. Since Padmakar's considerable attentions were directed toward a gosain adventurer long vilified by the Bundela Rajputs, the *Himmatbahadur Birdavali* cannot be dismissed as mere panegyric—indeed, the poetry is all the more significant given that Padmakar, in praising the Gosain, chose to cut his ties to the lavish patronage of Arjun Singh himself, which the poet had enjoyed virtually up until 1792.⁶² Among the many services Padmakar had performed for Arjun Singh was the blessing of his sword with thousands of incantations to the goddess Chandi, a manifestation of *sakti* or divine energy often associated with violence, devastation, and weaponry.⁶³ Padmakar's decision to attach himself to Anupgiri's rising star was based on some hard-headed political calculations: first, on the fact that Arjun Singh was no more, defeated and killed in battle (by the hand of Anupgiri himself, according to the poet's telling);

⁶¹ *Himmatbahadur Birdavali*, pp. 2–8 (selections from vv. 3–50).

⁶² Bhagvandin, Introduction to *Himmatbahadur Birdavali*, p. v. Bhagvandin is at a loss to explain Padmakar's shift in allegiance, considering the many qualities that recommended Arjun Singh, and the conclusion to his lengthy introduction includes the lament that Padmakar had not chosen to commemorate the Rajput's earlier victory against Anupgiri in 1762. He offers a telling comparison between the Rajput and the Gosain (p. xxxvi): '1—Arjunsingh was a kshatriya, and a true kshatriya. Himmat Bahadur was the son of a Sanadhya Brahman beggar and the disciple of a thieving gosain. 2—Arjun was a kshatriya who was completely devoted to kshatriya patriotism. Himmat Bahadur was a brave brahman and a gosain devotee of Siva who served the foreigner and the irreligious *yavans* [barbarian, can also mean Muslim]. 3—Arjunsingh never begged the assistance of anyone, he always fought with his own personal strength and helped others. Himmat Bahadur always sought the aid of others. 4—Himmat Bahadur fought with his own self interest in mind, he wanted to establish his own state come what may. The villages and territories that Arjunsingh won in battle he always offered to his ward [Bhakta Singh], and if he had wanted he could have established a state at any time. 5—Even on his deathbed Himmat Bahadur was engaged in trickery and deceit, which for a man of courage and honour is a great sin. One hears nothing of this sort with respect to Arjunsingh. 6—Himmat Bahadur was a kind of traitor to his country. Arjunsingh was innocent of this treachery. Indeed, because he fought against a traitor we can speak of him as a lover of his country. As a result of all these points, the name of Arjunsingh is accorded such great respect that Himmat Bahadur's name pales in comparison'. One comparison that Bhagvandin fails to make, of course, is that after 1792, Arjun Singh was dead and Anupgiri was, to put it bluntly, not dead.

⁶³ Bhagvandin in *Himmatbahadur Birdavali*, p. xxxiv. On Chandi or Candika, see C. Dimmitt and J. A. B. van Buitenen (eds), *Classical Hindu Mythology: A Reader in the Sanskrit Puranas*, Philadelphia, 1978, pp. 220, 225. The following ode to the goddess from the Siva Purana (quoted on p. 220) captures the sentiment best: 'Smeared with the mire of demon blood and fat, ablaze with rays, May your sword be auspicious! O Candika, we bow to you!'

and second, that the Gosain was the most viable military patron in the general vicinity. It is significant that Padmakar did not attach himself to Ali Bahadur directly. One reason must have been that Anupgiri was of Bundelkhand; also Ali Bahadur was, at least ostensibly Muslim (despite being the grandson of the former Peshwa, Bajirao I),⁶⁴ and consequently may not have patronised the 'vir-rasika' style of commemorative verse that Padmakar was peddling. In any event, the victory in 1792 was Anupgiri's alone, despite his alliance with Ali Bahadur, and it represented a major turning-point not just in Anupgiri's life but in the political culture of Bundelkhand—it signified, with Padmakar's changed alliance, that Rajput supremacy in the region was now at an end, humbled by a Saiva gosain.⁶⁵

Emboldened by the victory against Arjun Singh if not the praises heaped upon him by the likes of Padmakar, and enriched by the newly acquired revenues of a major portion of Bundelkhand, Anupgiri began to make alterations in his military capabilities that were commensurate with his newly acquired vision of himself as Maharaja. Most notably, soon after 1792, he engaged the services of a European adventurer by the name of John Mieselbach.⁶⁶ By the turn of the century, Mieselbach was commanding

⁶⁴ Ali Bahadur's father was the fifth son of Bajirao, named Shahshah Bahadur (b. 1734); his mother was Mastani, Bajirao's Muslim mistress and the subject of local scandal, particularly when the Peshwa brought her into the household. See R. D. Palsokar, *Bajirao I: An Outstanding Cavalry General*, New Delhi, 1995, p. 53.

⁶⁵ Indeed, according to an independent Bundelkhandi telling (related in Bhagvandin, *Himmatbahadur Birdavali*, pp. xxxi–xxxii), the end of Arjun Singh's dominance had been predicted by a sadhu whom Arjun Singh used to wait upon in his youth, who prophesied that the Rajput would rise to great fame and win three important battles, only to be killed in the fourth (the battle against Anupgiri) by a member of Arjun Singh's clan. The contrast with Padmakar's assertion that Anupgiri himself killed Arjun Singh is significant insofar as it suggests that united Rajput dominance in Bundelkhand was under strain well prior to Anupgiri's arrival in 1790.

⁶⁶ Some sources identify Mieselbach as the recently arrived Dutch soldier of fortune and nephew of the chief of the Dutch Chinsurah Factory, one Mr Heining; see 'Papers Relative to Bundelkhand', British Library Add. Mss. 13,591, 5b; and 'Correspondence of Thomas Brooke at Benares with Major M. Shawe, Secretary to Lord Wellesley, 1803–1805', British Library Add. Mss. 37, 281, 205f; other sources identify him as a Dane (most notably, Bhalla, 'The Gosain Brothers', 136). This latter impression is probably based on the fact that he retired to the Danish settlement at Serampore after 1807 and died there in 1819. Hence W. R. Pogson, *History of the Bundelas*, 1828, rpt. New Delhi, 1974), p. 126, erroneously quotes Mieselbach's obituary in the *Government Gazette*, Calcutta, 28 October 1819, to the effect that Mieselbach was a Dane (Bhalla also cites the *Government Gazette* obituary, but does not misquote it.) The notice in the *Government Gazette* in fact makes no mention of Mieselbach's nationality, but does note that 'the Danish flag was hoisted half-mast high on the occasion' of his death. According to 'Papers Relative to Bundelkhand' (5b) and 'Correspondence of Thomas Brooke' (205f), Mieselbach signed on with Anupgiri and Ali Bahadur in 1792–1793, just after the battle against Arjun Singh, to assist in the subsequent siege of Kalinjari. Mieselbach's career path is further confused by the assertion in the *Government Gazette* that he was in the service of Anupgiri for 18 years. Mieselbach remained in Anupgiri's employ until 1804, the year of the Gosain's death, if the *Government Gazette*'s (admittedly loose)

approximately 6,000 of Anupgiri's foot-soldiers and, in conformity with the Gosain's wishes, training them according to European infantry drill—adding to the general British apprehension at the time that 'the emigration of Europeans to the Military service of the Native princes is become very frequent and if not checked may produce very serious consequences in the improvement of their discipline'.⁶⁷ By 1800, Anupgiri had under his command approximately 10,000 men, 4,000 of whom were 'Nangas of the tribe of Sunnasee, 1,500 Chundelas [Rajputs], and the remainder Hindoostanees'.⁶⁸ In other words, Rajputs from one of the main rival clan lineages in the region were willing to serve under Anupgiri's standard. Also significant is the term 'Hindoostanee', which referred to a more general and diverse peasant base.⁶⁹ By 1803, the Rajput force under his command had swollen to nearly 4,000 cavalry, 'said to be very superior in equipment to the cavalry generally maintained by the native princes of India'. In addition, he possessed 'three Battalions of infantry, disciplined and armed in the European manner, under the command of Colonel Meeselback and of a considerable number of irregular infantry [nagas] carrying matchlocks and otherwise seriously armed'. The opinion of the political agent who provided these estimates, Graeme Mercer, was that 'these troops constitute the most effective force at present existing in Bundelcund'.⁷⁰ What Anupgiri had achieved in terms of Bundelkhandi political culture with the defection of Padmakar in 1792, he would achieve, in military-cultural terms, with the

assertion is to be believed, he entered Anupgiri's service in 1786—when Anupgiri was involved in intrigues in Delhi. However, the earliest mention of Mieselbach that I have seen is in official Company correspondences of 1795, according to which the adventurer and four other Europeans (two of whom, named Arnott and Bellasis, were said to have been in Company employ) entered Bundelkhand in March to seek their fortunes in the service of Indian princes. See C.W. Malet, Resident at Poona, to John Shore, Governor-General, no. 4 of 17 April [dated 25 March 1795], *Bengal Political Consultations* (hereafter BPC), OIOC, and W. Palmer, resident with Scindia, to Shore, no. 18 of 12 June 1795 [dated 28 May 1795], BPC. They first appeared to join with the Bundela Rajputs of Kalinjar, led by Dhokub Singh; however, they soon found themselves completely outnumbered and surrounded by Ali Bahadur's men. Mieselbach, not unwisely, decided to switch sides (G.T. Cherry, Resident at Lucknow, to Shore, no. 16 of 21 September 1795 [dated 10 September 1795], BPC). The fate of Bellasis and the other three men is unknown, but it is likely they followed suit. This, then, appears to be the route by which Mieselbach eventually came to Anupgiri's attention.

⁶⁷ Palmer to Shore, no. 18 of 12 June 1795 (dated 28 May 1795), BPC. According to one observer ('Papers relative to Bundelkhand', 96f), however, this fear was misplaced with regard to Mieselbach: 'For some years past one battalion has been placed under the charge of Mr Mieselbeck, but has not yet attained any great degree of discipline'.

⁶⁸ 'Papers relative to Bundelkhand', 95b–96f.

⁶⁹ See the discussion of polity and peasantry in Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy*, esp. p. 27.

⁷⁰ G. Mercer to Edmonstone, Shahpore, no. 9 of 3 March 1804 (dated 5 September 1803), *Bengal Secret and Political Consultations* (hereafter BSPC). The description of Anupgiri's troop strength also comes from this letter.

increasingly successful recruitment of Bundelkhandi (if not Bundela) Rajputs and peasants in the following decade.

But did Anupgiri, in the mid-1790s, really believe himself to be a king, a *chakravartin* in the classical Indo-Persian mould, as Maharaja Himmat Bahadur Anupgiri Gosain? The following sections, outlining the mechanics of his alliance with the British and their entry into the politics of Bundelkhand, throw some doubt on the extent to which he committed himself fully to such visions of royal grandeur despite Padmakar's high-flying rhetoric. Even in the mid-1790s, well prior to British involvement, there are strong indications that Anupgiri's pretensions to kingship were simply that: a conscious pretending. Following his defeat of Arjun Singh, Anupgiri and Ali Bahadur commenced the piecemeal settlement of the province, ostensibly on behalf of the Peshwa. This involved the bringing to heel of the numerous petty and not-so-petty Rajput chieftains of the province, which, as the decade progressed, seemed to be an endless task—symbolised by Ali Bahadur's lengthy (and ultimately unsuccessful) siege of the fortress at Kalinjār by the turn of the century, and complicated by constant raids against their combined forces. As early as the mid-1790s, rumours began to swirl in Bundelkhand that 'Himmut Buhadoor instigated these depredations [of local Rajput chieftains against Ali Bahadur's forces], in order to secure his own power, which he apprehended would be terminated by the establishment of tranquillity: for while he commanded the troops, his sway was absolute, and that of Ulee Buhadoor nominal; and it is probable that the dread of the Peshwa alone deterred him from usurping the government of the province'.⁷¹ It appears that Anupgiri had not deemed it politic to abandon the tested methods of military entrepreneurship.

Theatres of Empire

On 14 August 1802, Ali Bahadur died, 'afflicted with a dropsy' while engaged in the siege of Kalinjār.⁷² If there had been any doubts about Anupgiri's stature as the main player on the ground in Bundelkhand up to this point, this event removed them. Ali Bahadur left behind a brother, Ghani Bahadur, and two sons—Shamsher Bahadur (mentioned above), a youth of 16 years, at the time resident with his mother in Poona, and Zulfikar Ali Bahadur, a child of two years, at Kalinjār with his mother. Ghani Bahadur, realising that he held pre-eminent position among Marathas in Bundelkhand with the death of his brother so long as his brother's elder son remained in Poona, immediately placed the two-year-old Zulfikar Ali on the throne and declared himself regent. To confirm the coronation of

⁷¹ Poyson, *History of the Boondelas*, p. 121, n. 105.

⁷² Wm. Scott, Resident at Lucknow, to N.B. Edmonstone, Secretary to Government, Secret Political, and Foreign Departments, no. 26 of 16 September 1802 (dated 26 August 1802), BPC.

the child-Nawab (who was held on the lap of his uncle during the ceremony) on 23 August, the assembled nobles offered *nazars* (gifts in cash) of varying amounts; significantly, Anupgiri presented 11 gold coins—nearly double that presented by Ghani Bahadur himself. In so doing, Anupgiri sent a message to all concerned: first, that he considered himself the main figure of authority in the province (and was acknowledged as such by his main rival and friend, Ghani Bahadur);⁷³ and second, that while he may have sanctioned Ghani Bahadur's action, he understood Zulfikar Ali's status to be independently legitimate according to the announcement made at last moment by Begum Chanda Bhani, the mother of the young child, that 'as soon as the eldest son [Shamsher Bahadur] of the late Nawaub should arrive from Poona he should be placed upon the *Musnud*'.⁷⁴

Not surprisingly, few in Bundelkhand or beyond the province trusted Ghani Bahadur's intentions—least of all his nephew, Shamsher Bahadur, who set off early in the following year, with the Peshwa's blessing, for Kalinjar. Meanwhile Anupgiri, in January 1803, instructed Mieselbach to probe the possibility of opening negotiations with the British through Richard Ahmuty, the Collector at Allahabad.⁷⁵ Intelligence reached Anupgiri in June of that year that in tandem with Shamsher's approach, Daulatrao Shinde was plotting an ambitious joining of forces with Jaswant Rao Holkar and Raghujee Bhonsle so as to mount a series of pre-emptive strikes into the Gangetic plain, using Bundelkhand as a staging ground. If successful, such a combination would have changed dramatically the scope of the coming Anglo-Maratha war, essentially opening up a third and much more damaging theatre of operations all-too-close to the heart of British supply lines at Allahabad. Anupgiri promptly instructed Mieselbach to

⁷³ The amicable relations that prevailed between Anupgiri and Ghani Bahadur is reflected in a letter of late August 1803 from Anupgiri to Ahmuty, no. 15B of 3 March 1803 (undated, but received 26 August 1803), BSPC.

⁷⁴ 'Translation of a paper of intelligence from the camp of Zoolekar Ally Khan son of the late Nawaub Ally Bahadur, dated the 24 and 25 of Rubbee us Sami, corresponding with the 24th and 25th of August 1802', no. 28 of 16 September 1802, BPC. My interpretation of this event differs substantially from that of Bhalla. 'The Gosain Brothers', pp. 133–34, who (citing the same source) felt that Anupgiri conspired with Ghani Bahadur in placing the child on the throne. Rather, I would argue that Anupgiri was hedging his bets, waiting to learn of the intentions of the Peshwa and to see whether Shamsher Bahadur would depart for Bundelkhand so as to stake his claim. The passage cited above continues thus, in case there is any doubt about Anupgiri's intentions: 'The Rajah replied [to the statement by the Begum Chanda Bhani] that since, were the Musnud to continue vacant, the military and civil affairs would get into confusion, he consented to the measure of placing Zoolekar Ally on the Musnud, until his eldest brother should arrive from Poona, who would then assume the reins of Government'.

⁷⁵ Mieselbach to Ahmuty, no. 160 of 22 June 1803 (dated 1 June 1803), BSPC. Mieselbach notes Anupgiri's concern in this letter that nearly six months had passed since his earlier communication with Ahmuty and the Governor-General, which would place the original contact in January.

forward his intelligence to Ahmuty, who immediately passed it on to Calcutta.⁷⁶ In early July, Shamsher Bahadur arrived at Kalinjar, supported by 5,000 horse in the service of Holkar; on the morning of 23 August the young Nawab made his move, attacking and plundering Ghani Bahadur's camp, and seizing him and his family. At about the same time he demanded, as a show of submission, a payment of Rupees 9,000 from Anupgiri. The Gosain refused, and held his ground from a nearby encampment in plain view.⁷⁷

Shamsher Bahadur's aggressive tactics in dealing with his own uncle, whose poisoning he ordered in due course,⁷⁸ in combination with the reported approach of Maratha troops in the form of *pindaris* from the south and west, convinced Anupgiri that his most secure future lay with the British. Hence, he commenced negotiations with them in earnest. For their part, the British recognised that Anupgiri's intelligence had proven particularly valuable in confirming suspicions that had arisen in the Calcutta council regarding Daulatrao Shinde's intentions in north India, and had enabled them to take crucial preventive diplomatic and strategic measures;⁷⁹

⁷⁶ In Mieselbach's words: 'While I was sitting with the Rajah an express by couple of Jassoos arrived from Dowlut Row Sindia's camp with a letter for the Rajah and one for Gunnee Behadur. The contents of which was as follows: That Dowlut Row, Holkar, and Nagpore Rajah all combined together that they will have an army about 200,000 horsemen, and 12 brigades to face the English Army, and Nizam's now at Deccan, and that he had sent off about 5,000 pindarrahs and 3,000 horsemen with six battalions: Jesseby to stay with the Bhow to be in readiness in that Quarter, and also had wrote to General Peron to combine with the Selks and that the Rajah and Gunnee to be in readiness in this part should the war be proclaimed, so that it is his wish to face and attack the English from all Quarters. I asked the Rajah if I might write to you on this subject, his answer to me was that I might do as I please, but not in his name; I asked him for the copy of the letter he had received but he declined giving it fearing it might be sent by the English to Dowlut Row Scindia.' Mieselbach to Ahmuty, no. 160 of 22 June 1803 (dated 1 June 1803), BSPC. He would add in a letter to Ahmuty the following day, 2 June 1803 (no. 161 of 22 June 1803, BSPC), that '5,000 pindaries with 3,000 Horsemen are ordered to join Himmudt Bahadur, and Gunnee Behadur is commanded by Durram Row Pundit to begin to make depredations into the Company's dominions'. For the lay of the land in 1803, see Sarkar, *Fall of the Mughal Empire*, Vol. 4, pp. 221, 235.

⁷⁷ William Scott, Resident at Lucknow, to Edmonstone, no. 45 of 22 September 1803 (dated 27 August 1803), BSPC; 'Translation of a paper of intelligence from Kalinjer dated the 4th of Jemmedi ul Awul 1218 Hlj. corresponding with the 23rd of August 1803', no. 46 of 22 September 1803, BSPC. For Shamsher's arrival, see Ahmuty to Edmonstone, no. 25 of 28 July 1803 (dated 11 July 1803), BSPC.

⁷⁸ See Pogson, *A History of the Bonedelas*, p. 123.

⁷⁹ See, for example, Edmonstone to Colonel Collins, Resident with Shinde, no. 163 of 22 June 1803 (dated 18 June 1803), BSPC. An intriguing measure of the precise value of that particular item of intelligence to British strategic designs during the middle months of 1803 is afforded by correspondence between Mieselbach and Governor-General Barlow five years later, following the announcement that the pension of the Dutch adventurer had been set at a paltry Rs 300 per month. In a breathtakingly long letter to Barlow, dated 4 June 1807 (no. 7 of 19 June 1807, BPC), Mieselbach lamented the amount, compared it unfavourably to remunerations whilst in Anupgiri's employ, and enumerated the many considerable services he had rendered to the Company, first and most important among which was the intelligence that he

more importantly, Wellesley and Lord Lake deemed the benefits of acquiring the de facto control over Bundelkhand (a portion of which had been granted to them on paper by the Treaty of Bassein) and depriving that province from the Marathas to be too fortuitous an opportunity to let slip by. Wellesley instructed Ahmuty (representing the Governor-General) and Graeme Mercer (who represented the Commander-in-Chief, Lord Lake) to come to terms with Anupgiri regarding a mutually agreeable arrangement for the 'transfer' of Bundelkhand to British control, with the understanding that the Gosain and his troops would aid in the 'settlement' of the province. It quickly emerged in negotiations with Anupgiri, whom the British were careful to address henceforth as either Rajah or Maharaja Himmat Bahadur and whose principal representative throughout this phase was Colonel Mieselbach, that his main objects were threefold: (a) the granting of a very large Bundelkhandi *jaidad*, or the right to collect revenues for the maintenance of troops, the longevity of which was contingent upon the duration of military operations against 'refractory' Bundela and Maratha warlords in the province; (b) the eventual grant of a jagir in the Ganga-Jamuna Doab in the vicinity of Sivarajpur on the south bank of the Ganga above Kanpur; and (c) the release of his brother Umraogiri from the confinement he had been subjected to as a result of his hazy entanglement in the Vizier Ali conspiracy of 1799.⁸⁰

The second and third points were readily complied with; the first, which the British ultimately did agree to, was a matter of some revealing discussion and subsequent contention, the details of which are worth recapitulating. During preliminary negotiations with Ahmuty and Mercer, the suggestion was made that, rather than have Anupgiri support the troops on his *jaidad*, the Company pay them directly, and that any temporary land grant in Bundelkhand be made to the Gosain for the private and personal maintenance of him and his family. Not surprisingly, Mieselbach—on Anupgiri's behalf—rejected this suggestion on the grounds that 'the Rajah would consider this proposal as a wish on the part of Government speedily to dismiss his troops, and to annihilate his own influence and power in the province'.⁸¹ The suggestion was withdrawn and the *jaidad* granted; a formal agreement was drawn up on 4 September 1803,⁸² so that British troops could legally enter the province to join forces with Anupgiri's men, thus commencing the piecemeal 'conquest' of the province. The task that confronted them was essentially twofold: on the one hand, to deal with the

transmitted in June of 1803 regarding the amassing of Maratha troops. Barlow promptly issued his opinion, no 11 of 19 June 1803, that Mieselbach's service was indeed unusually remarkable and hence he was due a revised pension of Rs 1,000 per month.

⁸⁰ Edmonstone to Mercer, no. 2 of 3 March 1803 (dated 22 July 1803), BSPC.

⁸¹ G. Mercer to Edmonstone, Shahpore, no. 9 of March 1804 (dated 5 September 1803), BSPC.

⁸² The terms are spelled out in a *wajib al-arz* of that date, no 11 of 3 March 1804, BSPC.

Maratha warlords in the province, particularly Shamsheer Bahadur, preferably by coming to some formal treaty arrangement, but, failing that, to overcome them by brute force; and, on the other hand, to subjugate the various and sundry Bundela chieftains and *kiladars* (fortress commanders) who had to date resisted the gosain's authority. Anupgiri assured them that all this would be readily accomplished. His *jaidad*, meanwhile, included fairly well-accessible estates (*mahals*) to the west and east of the Ken river in eastern Bundelkhand producing about Rupees 2,000,000, slightly more than half of which had formerly been granted to him by Ali Bahadur.²³

Joint military operations seemed to get off to a positive start, with Ahmuty recommending a thirteen-gun salute to honour Anupgiri upon his arrival on 16 September in the quickly erected British encampment at Teroa.²⁴ Ahmuty estimated at this time that 'About four thousand horse and 8,000 foot have accompanied Himmat Behadur exclusive of the three battalions [about 1,500 infantry] under Mr Meesselback with 25 pieces of ordnance of different calibres'—the increased numbers reflecting Anupgiri's burgeoning troop responsibility under the new and improved *jaidad*. Very soon, however, it became apparent to Colonel Powell, commanding British forces in Bundelkhand, that Anupgiri neither maintained a sufficient force in the field nor was he overly anxious to engage the enemy, despite repeated assurances from the Gosain to Powell of his ability to deal expeditiously with the recalcitrants in the province. Powell quickly came to the conclusion that Anupgiri was 'a crafty old Hindoo' who was propagating the view that the British detachment in Bundelkhand was little more than 'a tool in his hands to execute whatever objects he may have in view'.²⁵ Ahmuty, meanwhile, had been compelled through illness in early October to take a recuperative leave from the province and could, therefore, no longer act as a check on the Gosain (one almost suspects Anupgiri's occult hand here); he would be replaced in early November by Mercer's protégé, Lieutenant (soon promoted to Captain) John Baillie, representing Lord Lake.²⁶ Anupgiri took advantage of the temporary absence of any political check on his authority to further curtail the size and operational range of his forces. Consequently, Powell complained, in late October, 'that a much higher degree of importance had been attached to the force

²³ The exact value of the *jaidad* would be a matter of contention, with estimates ranging from 18 lakhs to 22 lakhs. See esp. no. 103 of 17 May 1804, BSPC, a schedule of the *mahals* and their contested values drawn up by Captain John Baillie.

²⁴ Ahmuty to Mercer, no. 17 of 3 March 1804 (dated 15 September 1803), BSPC.

²⁵ Powell to Mercer, no. 60 of 3 March 1804 (dated 15 October 1803), BSPC.

²⁶ Ahmuty to Mercer, no. 28 of 3 March 1804 (dated 28 September 1803); and Ahmuty to Mercer, no. 30 of 3 March 1804 (dated 5 October 1803), BSPC. In the first letter, from Banda, Ahmuty informs Mercer (who is near Agra with Lake) of his illness and begs to be allowed to return to Allahabad; in the second, written from Allahabad, Ahmuty informs him of the increased fever and his decision to return to that city on his own accord. On Baillie's appointment, see Mercer to Baillie, no. 79 of 3 March 1804 (dated 20 October 1803), BSPC.

and military abilities of the Rajah, than they are either of them, entitled to'. Despite Anupgiri's boasts of cutting Shamsher Bahadur's forces to pieces at his leisure with a mere 1,500 men, Powell claimed to have 'the most undoubted proof of his real sentiments being the very opposite to those he professed, [namely,] that he would never have dared with his whole united force to have met Shumshere'.⁸⁷ Powell also asserted that the people of Bundelkhand preferred the British to the Gosain: 'As one instance of the confidence which the natives already testify towards the English, I shall only mention that the ryotts and zemindars of the Rajah's own villages come to solicit [*sic*] me for safeguards for protection against the Rajah's people, although he himself is present'.⁸⁸ The British colonel would also lose no opportunity in apprising Mercer of Anupgiri's true troop strength, which he estimated at no more than 3,000 or at most 4,000 horse, and between 1,500 foot (under Mieselbach's command)⁸⁹—a far cry from the numbers said to be attending the Gosain in mid-September.

Baillie, soon after his arrival in the province, agreed substantially with Powell's assessment of Anupgiri's delaying tactics,⁹⁰ and would eventually confirm (after the Gosain's death in June 1804) a suspicion he had held from April onward that even the colonel's numerical estimate of Anupgiri's troop strength had been high—that 'He has not now a single man more than he had under Allee Buhadur'.⁹¹ In the meantime, Baillie compiled a 'volume of accusations against the Rajah', in part deriving from disagreements over the exact revenue value of the *jaidad*—Baillie insisting that it was worth fully 22 lakh rupees, Anupgiri assessing it at 1,800,000 and demanding an adjustment of two lakhs more.⁹² To exacerbate matters, Baillie learned from Mieselbach that Anupgiri was in fact squeezing 24

⁸⁷ Powell to Mercer, no. 85 of 3 March 1804 (dated 22 October 1803), BSPC.

⁸⁸ Powell to Major Armstrong (with Lake at Agra), no. 75 of 3 March 1804 (dated 18 October 1803), BSPC. In a letter to Mercer the previous day, no. 76 of 3 March 1804, BSPC, he had noted that 'they one and all refuse to have any kind of settlement transacted through the medium of the Rajah'.

⁸⁹ Powell to Mercer, no. 85 of 3 March 1804 (dated 22 October 1803), BSPC. Powell's open disdain for Anupgiri would earn him a formal censure from Wellesley (Edmonstone to Powell, no. 88 of 3 March 1804 [dated 16 November 1803], BSPC).

⁹⁰ His assessment of Anupgiri's intentions can be seen in Baillie to Mercer, paragraph 8 of no. 126 of 3 March 1804 (dated 18 November 1803), BSPC.

⁹¹ Private letter from Baillie to Mercer, included as no. 109 of 17 May 1804 (dated 5 April 1804), BSPC. Baillie elaborates in a letter to Mercer, no. 234 of 21 June 1804 (dated 6 June 1804), BSPC: 'I could never induce him to submit a muster roll of his forces, nor could I form a correct estimate of their number, from the circumstance of a large proportion of them being constantly employed in the collection of the revenue of his *jaidad*, but I have now reason to be convinced that the number of his cavalry has never exceeded 2,500 and that these with the three battalions of infantry of 1,500 men commanded by Colonel Meisilback and occasional levies of matchlockmen employed in the collections have uniformly constituted the whole of the rajah's force'.

⁹² Baillie to Mercer, no. 102 of 17 May 1804 (dated 23 March 1804), BSPC

lakhs rupees out of his *jaidad*, and that 'the districts which he set apart for the Company could never be collected without the whole of the force in the country being employed in it during the Government of Allee Buhadur'.⁹³ Baillie added, however, a more serious charge, namely, that while Anupgiri put up a facade of enmity and aggression against the Bundela Rajput, he secretly colluded with them to prolong the military operations in the province, thereby extending the term of his *jaidad* collections: 'The Boondelaha are not so submissive, because they have the Rajah behind the curtain to support them, tho' he is obliged to disavow his support and sometimes even to attack them'. It is not entirely surprising, then, that less than two weeks later Company troops in the field accidentally fired upon Anupgiri's men during a routine night-time march, supposing them to be the enemy.⁹⁴

For their part, Wellesley and Lake had come to the same conclusion as Baillie and Powell regarding Anupgiri's tactics and had determined as early as October of 1803 that given the Gosain's failure to raise the requisite number of troops, it would be appropriate to simply renegotiate the agreement of 4 September and 'resume' the *jaidad*, granting him instead the jagir at Sivarajpur he so desired.⁹⁵ Though Baillie seemed to get some indication that such proceedings would not be altogether offensive to Anupgiri, he deemed it politic to bide his time until the Gosain's duplicity and inaction were openly known to all and the military conditions in the province were more favourable.⁹⁶ Mercer encouraged his protégé in this regard, observing candidly that 'My friend Himmut has certainly taken care of himself, and the sooner he is looked after the better; whenever you

⁹³ Private letter from Baillie to Mercer, no. 109 of 17 May 1804 (dated 5 April 1804), BSPC. Baillie adds that, to add insult to injury, 'The Rajah went on collecting in the districts which he assigned to us'. Indeed, according to Meiselbach, when the Dutchman had informed Ahmuty of these sundry details, presumably before the latter's illness removed him from the province, Ahmuty's reply was, 'We must please the Rajah until we get rid of the Nawab [Shamsher Bahadur]'. This introduces the possibility that Ahmuty was colluding with Anupgiri in some loose manner, and that he had departed the province under the cover of fever so as to escape the glare of Powell's discomfiting inquiries.

⁹⁴ W.D. Fawcett to J. Gerard, 93 of 21 June 1804 (dated 1 June 1804), BSPC.

⁹⁵ Mercer to Ahmuty, para. 6 of no. 44 of 3 March 1804 (dated 8 October 1803), BSPC.

⁹⁶ Baillie to Mercer, para. 8 of no. 109 of 3 March 1804 (dated 9 November 1803), and no. 176 of 3 March 1804 (dated 14 December 1803), BSPC. In the December letter, for example, he notes: 'his [Anupgiri's] conduct upon this occasion has added to the many proofs which I possess; and which have been submitted to His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief as the grounds of my entire conviction, that exclusively of the assistance in the department of supply which the presence of the Rajah has afforded, and of the services of Colonel Meiselbach at present in the southern districts of Boondelound, our connexion with this chieftain will in no degree secure to us the beneficial effects which might have been justly expected from the favourable terms which were originally granted to him.

His failure on the present occasion however, will furnish an additional instrument of the success of my negotiation [*sic*] hereafter for the relinquishment of his Jaidad, and I shall not fail to apply it in the manner but calculated to accomplish His Excellency's views'.

think it advisable to notice his laxity in the service, and deficiency of troops publicly, a letter to the purport you formerly mentioned will be sent by the Commander-in-Chief [Lake]; but His Excellency says, that it would not be right for him to write it without some public grounds'.⁷⁷ Before Baillie could put any of these plans into action, however, he was stopped short on 2 June 1804 by news of Anupgiri's failing health. Sensing time to be short, Baillie rushed to Anupgiri's side for a final interview and would recall later that day that the Gosain's 'faculties and powers of utterance are almost entirely exhausted[;] . . . on the occasion of my visiting him this morning, he made an exertion for the purpose of requesting *my protection of his infant son* which I thought would have proved fatal'.⁷⁸ Anupgiri died the very next day, 3 June 1804. By that time, or just afterwards, his brother Umraogiri had swept into camp; he immediately deputed two of his *chelas* with 50 horsemen to conduct Anupgiri's body to the banks of the Ganga for interment (according to Dasnami rites) at Sivrajpur.⁷⁹

It is at this stage that Baillie comes into his own and earns, as they say, the 'approbation of His Excellency the Most Noble the Governor-General'. His description of the sequence of events is revealing:

5. . . . as the solemn declaration of the Rajah to me on the day before his death left no doubt of his intention of bequeathing all his property and rights to his only son, an infant now in camp[,] and the avowed inclination of the several sirdars pointed to this boy as the only heir of his father's property, and successor in the command of the troops whose rights they were disposed to acknowledge, I considered it to be indispensably [*sic*] to the important object of preventing tumult and disorder in the camp, to evince my own acknowledgement of those rights by a formal act and declaration vesting the command of the *Rosals* [cavalry] on Rajah Nerinder Geer [the child] till the pleasure of Government should be known.
6. I proceeded accordingly to the camp of the late Rajah this morning and having summon'd Rajah Omrao Geer and all the principal sirdars to his tent, I placed the boy upon his father's musnud and directed all the chiefs to make the customary presents and acknowledgements of his authority which were offered unanimously and with the greatest readiness and satisfaction by all, in my presence excepting Rajah Omrao Geer who departed from the tent with some appearance of displeasure.

⁷⁷ Private letter from Mercer to Baillie, included as no. 108 of 17 May 1804 (dated 30 March 1804), BSPC.

⁷⁸ Baillie to Mercer, no. 137 of 5 July 1804 (dated 2 June 1804), BSPC. This letter is catalogued out of order, and should precede no. 232 of 21 June 1804, *Emphasis added*.

⁷⁹ Baillie to Mercer, no. 232 of 21 June 1804 (dated 4 June 1804), BSPC. In this letter, Baillie makes reference to a private letter to Mercer of 3 June, which unfortunately is not included in the consultations volume.

7. The general character of Rajah Omrao Geer [Umraogiri] and the limited influence which he possesses over the troops of his deceased brother, give [*sic*] me no ground to apprehend any ill effect from his dissatisfaction at the measure which I was induced to adopt and I have every reason to hope that my endeavours to prevent any new commotion or disturbance in the country upon this critical and arduous occasion, will prove to be completely successful and that no material difficulty will occur in the accomplishment of any objects which His Excellency the Commander in Chief or the supreme Government may have in view respecting the Rajah's Jaidad.¹⁰⁰

This moment is overflowing with irony, given that Baillie performed precisely the same role in the usurpation of authority upon Anupgiri's death that Anupgiri had performed at the death of his old ally, Ali Bahadur, in 1802. The fact that the tool in each coronation drama was a two-year-old child only underlines the symmetry of the occasions. Baillie was probably aware of the parallel, since he had been active now in Bundelkhand for almost seven months and had, very quickly upon his arrival there, comprehended the political and military lay of the land. Baillie's main source of intelligence on the factions within the Gosain's entourage was Colonel John Mieselbach,¹⁰¹ the European adventurer that Anupgiri had engaged in 1795 and entrusted with the most sensitive mission in the Gosain's career—the negotiations for alliance with the British in Bundelkhand.

One may ask, however, who played the role of Ghani Bahadur, the scheming uncle of the child Nawab in 1802 who had appointed himself regent, during the upheaval in the Gosain's camp in June of 1804. The answer becomes apparent in subsequent correspondences: perched firmly between the child Rajah Narindragiri and the British agent John Baillie was the Gosain Kanchangiri, Anupgiri's most able and trusted *chela*, who would later manage Anupgiri's estate on behalf of the child. Not surprisingly, Baillie describes him as a 'well behaved person' who 'is said to possess considerable wealth'; moreover, he was 'the principal manager of the late Rajah's affairs and the person to whom the care of his property was uniformly entrusted'.¹⁰² Kanchangiri also happened to have a reputation for ruthless efficiency when it came to collecting revenue from recalcitrant zamindars. Three years earlier, he had attracted the notice of the British garrison in Allahabad by pursuing a Brahman landlord (who had reneged

¹⁰⁰ Baillie to Mercer, no. 232 of 21 June 1804 (dated 4 June 1804), BSPC. Emphasis added. One need only compare the italicised portion of this extract with that in the previous paragraph to appreciate Baillie's remarkably dextrous powers of interpretation in the service of Company interests.

¹⁰¹ Baillie to Mercer, para. 5 of no. 234 of 21 June 1804 (dated 6 June 1804), BSPC.

¹⁰² Baillie to Mercer, no. 72 of 5 July 1804 (dated 21 June 1804), BSPC.

on a debt to Anupgiri) into Awadh, capturing him and his children, burning the house in which he was hiding and killing several women and children therein.¹⁰³ After Anupgiri's death, Kanchangiri figured prominently in subsequent discussion over the resumption of the *jaidad* and the relocation of Narindragiri and the naga corps to the jagir near Kanpur in March 1806. More immediately, however, there was still the pressing matter of paying Anupgiri's troops; Kanchangiri proved instrumental in guaranteeing that the various captains formerly in Anupgiri's service who controlled the many forts and collected revenue in the *jaidad* mahals in fact directed that revenue not into their own pockets but to the rank and file soldiery. And regarding that soldiery, particularly Anupgiri's cavalry, Baillie would undergo a remarkable change of heart, observing that though admittedly few in number, 'they are far superior in appearance to any troops of this description which I have seen, in the country [Bundelkhand], and that under the superintendence of an European officer, they would be found of the highest utility in any situation in which their services might be required'.¹⁰⁴ More to the point,

whatever may have been the principles or motives by which the conduct of the late Rajah was guided, and the objects to which the services of his troops were directed during his lifetime, I have not observed the smallest trace of disaffection or disorder in his camp since his death, and on the contrary, the conduct and appearance of all his relations, principal sirdars, and troops have been such as to inspire me with the fullest confidence in their attachment to the British Government, and in their ready submission and obedience to its will and commands.

Anupgiri's widow, Fakhr-un-Nissa Begam, replied to Baillie's letter of condolence by stating that 'His [Anupgiri's] children, his relations, his servants and his troops who have been supported during a period of sixty years by troves of his money are now the faithful servants of the British Government and ready to obey their commands'.¹⁰⁵ This was not hyperbole: Anupgiri's naga and non-naga horse and foot under the command of Kanchangiri and Meiselbach continued to serve the Company as irregulars (similar to James Skinner's 'yellow boys') in the coming years in the subjugation of the province.¹⁰⁶ Mieselbach even sought on a number of

¹⁰³ Lt. Col. A. Kyd to Col. W. Scott, no. 71 of 24 June 1802 (dated 23 July 1802 [*s/c*, should be 1801]), BSPC.

¹⁰⁴ Baillie to Mercer, no. 234 of 21 June 1804 (dated 6 June 1804), BSPC.

¹⁰⁵ The widow of Rajah Himmat Bahadur to Baillie, no. 235 of 21 June 1804 (received 6 June 1804), BSPC.

¹⁰⁶ Naga service under the British in Bundelkhand was not without its ups and downs, however. See in particular, Baillie to Mercer, no. 319 of 7 March 1805 (dated 13 August 1804), BSPC.

occasions (and usually successfully) to have his wounded and aging troopers enrolled on the 'invalid thiana' lists.¹⁰⁷

The *Sadhu* who Came in from the Cold?

Surveying the trajectory of Anupgiri's career from the mid-1760s onward, particularly following his defeat against Company arms at Buxar in 1764, one can begin to discern a pattern: Anupgiri preferred (even under Shuja and Asaf ud-Daula) the political and military topography of the western and southwestern edge of the Ganga-Jamuna region, from Delhi in the north to Būndelkhand in the south. The reason for this is clear: as the territorial fringe between Company and Maratha spheres of influence, the western Doab and Bundelkhand represented the last vestige of fluid *ancien régime* politics between relatively weak states dependent as much on intrigue, military entrepreneurship and constantly shifting alliances as on brute force.¹⁰⁸ As that marginal fringe shrunk, as Anupgiri found himself increasingly hemmed in on all sides, he was impelled toward the conclusion that he must opt for one or the other major power wherein his interests and the interests of those close to him, gosains, would be most likely to thrive. The timing of his overtures to and alliance with the British from January to September 1803 suggest that a major factor in his decision-making was the Treaty of Bassein, signed on the last day of 1802, between the Governor-General and the Peshwa. From Anupgiri's perspective, the significance of that treaty was that the Peshwa had become a British vassal and could no longer hold sway over the Maratha warlord lineages. More precisely, Anupgiri could no longer seek the protection of the office of the Peshwa (via his sons and grandsons) when threatened by the likes of Shinde, whether Mahadji or Daulatrao. Add to this Shamsher Bahadur's aggressive posturing in Bundelkhand and his reliance on Holkar's horse in entering the province and arresting his uncle in the latter half of 1802, and one can easily perceive Anupgiri's apprehensions about the security of his future if he remained southwestward looking.

The alliance with the British was doubly advantageous for Anupgiri: it gave him full control over a massive *jaidad*—nearly twice that which had obtained under Ali Bahadur, much of which he would apparently not direct toward the maintenance of troops—and a future jagir centred on Sivarajpur, where his family, retainers and gosain adherents could live out their lives in relative independence and autonomy. Did the alliance with

¹⁰⁷ See e.g., Baillie to Edmonstone, No. 8 or 26 February 1807 (dated 14 February 1807), BPC and J. Richardson to Edmonstone, 32 of 4 January 1808 (dated 18 December 1807), BPC; cf. Seema Alavi, 'The Company Army and Rural Society: The Invalid Thana, 1780-1830', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 27 (1), 1993, pp. 147-78, and Alavi, *The Sepoys and the Company*.

¹⁰⁸ On that world, see D.H.A. Kolff, 'The End of an Ancien Régime'

the British offer Anupgiri and his military gosains a way, to use John Le Carré's evocative phrase, to 'come in from the cold'—to leave behind the life of itinerant soldiering and settle down? Possible, but in the process the gosains were asked to relinquish a great deal: most importantly, they had to give up their considerable armament and their mobile, marital lifestyle. That it took over six years after Anupgiri's demise for that eventuality to come to pass, and not without significant wavering on the part of Kanchangiri, his charge Narindragiri, and their adherents, suggests that it was anything but an easy decision.¹⁰⁹ In any event, Anupgiri's death in 1804 threatened the entire fragile arrangement; hence Baillie's haste in rushing to the Gosain's bedside, and his baldly aggressive interpretation of the Gosain's dying wish for the 'protection of his infant son' as an intention to bequeath 'all his property and rights to his only son'.

Baillie was particularly keen to certify the ascension of Narindragiri (and Kanchangiri) as the new leader of Anupgiri's army because of the immanent arrival of Umraogiri on the scene. Umraogiri's evident displeasure at Narindragiri's coronation ceremony suggests that he either had not had time to discuss these matters with Anupgiri, or that he disagreed completely with his political-cultural calculations vis-à-vis the British. In any event, he wished to assert himself as the true and rightful heir to the mantle of his and his brother's guru, Rajendragiri. By 1799, Umraogiri had even taken to identifying himself as 'Rajendragiri Gosain', thus symbolically subordinating Anupgiri to himself in the process.¹¹⁰ We do not know Anupgiri's feelings on the matter, though a bardic poem by Man Kavi current in Bundelkhand from the early 1790s suggests that part of Anupgiri's rise to prominence there included, in a sectarian context, the assertion that he and not Umraogiri was the disciple chosen to lead the *akhara*. Man Kavi's poem, entitled *Anupa-prakash* (The Splendour of Anupa[giri]), covers much of the same panegyric ground as Padmakar's *Himmatbahadur Birda wali*, but is different in one important respect: it gives a guru genealogy at the outset, along with a hagiographical vignette regarding the decision of Rajendragiri to take up arms. Umraogiri is not mentioned in the genealogy, a slight which takes on added importance in the context of the story that follows it: Rajendragiri, as a young disciple, was guarding the entrance to a cave in which his own guru, Dhyangiri, was absorbed in deep meditation. While thus engaged, Rajendragiri dutifully barred entrance to an unfamiliar figure, who turned out to be the divine apparition of Narayangiri, the guru of Dhyangiri's guru

¹⁰⁹ See e.g., the extensive correspondences included as enclosures in J. Wauchope to J. Adams, no. 85 of 4 July 1815 (dated 18 May 1815), BPC.

¹¹⁰ See, in particular, correspondences concerning his role in the Vizier Ali plot: G.H. Barlow, Secretary to Government, to Samuel Davis, Magistrate of Benares, no. 3 of 13 May 1799 (undated by possibly 13 May 1799), no. 11 of 3 June 1799 (dated 28 May 1799), and, most notably, J.H. Craig to D. Vanderheyden, no. 7 of 20 August 1799 (undated), Bengal Separate and Secret Consultations (stored with BSPC), where reference is made to 'Raja Rajinder Gheer Ghossein, more usually known by the name of Rajah Omrao-Gheer'.

(in other words, Rajendragiri's great-grandguru). Impressed with Rajendragiri's guru-devotion, Narayangiri granted a boon to the young ascetic. Rajendragiri responded: 'Maharaj, my wish is that I will one day be a great king and that everyone will obey my orders'. Narayangiri granted this wish and said, 'henceforth, you and the *chelas* you embrace will rule from generation to generation'.¹¹¹

It is possible that Umraogiri's displeasure was grounded in a less self-interested complaint: the elevation to the *masnad* of the two-year-old Narindragiri on the basis of that child's blood relation to Anupgiri contradicted established Dasnami practices (not to mention the prophesy of Dhyangiri, noted above), whereby the mantle of authority in the order is passed over the generations from guru to *chela*. Significantly, however, Umraogiri's attempt to oppose the elevation of the child Narindragiri seems to have met with no support among Anupgiri's followers. Baillie, it will be recalled, reported on 4 June 1804 that all but Umraogiri seemed content to accept the investiture of the two-year-old Narindragiri as Maharaja, and that 'the limited influence which he [Umraogiri] possesses over the troops of his deceased brother, give [*sic*] me no ground to apprehend any ill effect from his dissatisfaction'.¹¹² This episode suggests that the assembled followers of Anupgiri well understood what their deceased guru had engineered and viewed Umraogiri's arrival as an attempted coup. A letter from Anupgiri's widow to Baillie soon after the Gosain's death confirms this estimate: 'the accounts which I have since received of your kindness to my infant son and to the *adopted son* of my late husband[,] Kower Kunchun Geer[,] both from their own letters and the statements of Sundur Lall and Adjudeea Purshad [the Gosain's *vakils*] have recalled me to the shore of tranquillity and have afforded consolation to my mind.'¹¹³

¹¹¹ Lala Bahadur Bhatt, prose rendering of Man Kavi, 'Anupa Prakasa', 1.

¹¹² Baillie to Mercer, no. 232 of 21 June 1804 (dated 4 June 1804), BSPC.

¹¹³ The widow of Rajah Himmat Bahadur to Baillie, no. 235 of 21 June 1804 (received 6 June 1804), BSPC. Emphasis added. The events surrounding the transfer of Anupgiri's heirs to the jagir near Kanpur, and the travails of his family there over the next four decades, give some indication that the begam, though she played along, was soon weary of the drama. While an examination of the fate of the gosains in Sivrajpur over the next four decades is beyond the scope of this article, an interesting feature of the discussions concerning that fate is the ways in which British officials involved adjudged the merits of various claims according to the standard of a 'biological family'. Hence, different officials would attach different legal weight to whether an individual was the actual biological offspring or 'adopted' (i.e., a *chela*, though the *chelas* were soon careful to describe themselves legally as 'adopted' children), favouring the former in disputes. By the 1840s, when officials were adjudicating the inheritance of the estate after Narindragiri's death, legitimacy as natural-born heirs depended on whether both parents were of the same religion. In all of this can be seen the further refinements of political and biological legitimacy according to official convenience that would evolve into the contentious 'Doctrine of Lapse'. I am grateful to Dr Soema Alavi for bringing to my attention in a conversation of early 1995 the significance of the shifting family rhetoric in the context of the gosains at Sivrajpur.

Given the foregoing, it is possible to conclude that, in offering up the child Narindragiri as princely heir, Anupgiri was balancing the political desire of the imperial state for natural-born heirs, on the one hand, with the gosains norms of guru-*chela* succession, on the other. Certainly we can perceive within this compromise an unwillingness to disarm and become 'neither vagrants nor plunderers but fixed inhabitants [who] quietly employ themselves in their religious function'—that is, to accommodate themselves to the non-martial, ascetic religiosity held up as exemplary in Warren Hastings' proclamation three decades earlier.¹¹⁴ Indeed, Anupgiri's firm commitment to the continuation of military ascetic culture may have been hinted at in the very name of the place to which he sought to retire: *Sivrajpur*—the place of the rule of Siva. Despite his unquestionably elite status, then, perhaps we would not be too far off the mark in understanding Anupgiri Gosain as the paradigmatic subaltern sadhu—and not simply because he was a soldiering ascetic. At the end of his life he was caught between two worlds and struggled to reconcile each with the other, if not to ensure his own survival (which by 1804 had become moot in any case), then the survival of the people closest to him and the ascetic culture of arms in which they thrived.¹¹⁵ As with any subaltern historical trajectory, the subsequent narrative consists of a complex admixture of national irony and nationalist ideology: the culture, if not the function, of soldier asceticism would survive well into the colonial and post-colonial eras, its expressions most visibly manifest in the martial processions of the Vaishnava and Saiva *akharas* during the triennial *Kumbh* festivals held alternately in Ujjain, Allahabad, Nasik and Hardwar. While these processions would gradually evolve into theatrical caricatures far removed from any real military function, not unlike the theatre states propped up by the British in the one-third of Indian territory not under direct imperial rule,¹¹⁶ they would take on a much greater religious significance as a living museum of the martial potency of the *Hindu* (as opposed to Vaishnava and Saiva) ascetic past—just as the organic components of armed asceticism generally, the *akharas*, would be thought of increasingly as a basis for and model of armed

¹¹⁴ See nos 5 and 6 of 21 January 1773, Foreign Department, Secret Branch Proceedings, NAL.

¹¹⁵ On the subalternity of elites, see Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton, 1993, pp 35–37. Of course, anyone who has read Thomas Broughton's description of Kamptagiri's arrival at Daulatrao Shinde's camp with 1,500 armed nagas in 1809 (*Letters Written in a Maratha Camp*, London, 1813, p. 129) will know that many of Anupgiri's followers were unwilling to give up the life of military entrepreneurship and settle down in the jagir near Sivrajpur. Kamptagiri was a disciple of Kanchangiri, who himself would for a short time (with Narindragiri and the Begam in tow) seek service beyond the Company's dominions. But that, along with the travails of the family/disciples near Kanpur, including the participation of some Sivrajpur gosains in the revolt of 1857, are the subjects of another essay.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Dirks, *The Hollow Crown*. On the theatre of the *kumbh*, particularly in the nineteenth century, see my 'Soldier Monks and Militant Sadhus', pp. 155–56.

resistance to British rule.¹¹⁷ But perhaps the greatest irony of all is that the British, in allowing Anupgiri his pretensions to royalty so as to claim a certain legitimacy in forging an alliance with him, were able to thereby render the Rajput chieftains and Maratha warlords in Budelkhand politically impotent, for a time (one must not forget 1857, after all), as Indian princes.

Shameless Duplicity and Historical Agency

The late-medieval poet Kabir is thought to have asked, regarding gosains, *bairagis*, and nagas:

Are they ascetics or archers?
They profess detachment, but greed is their mind's resolve.
They shame their profession by wearing gold.
They collect stallions and mares,
Acquire villages, and go about as tax-collectors.¹¹⁸

Even in the medieval Indian world, then, where the armed ascetic was a familiar fixture, he had his critics. Kabir's vilification of armed ascetics as 'mindless and negligent', 'false sages', and 'lovers of *maya* [illusory riches]' presages the scorn heaped upon Anupgiri by Indians and Britons alike three centuries later. The problem of the armed ascetic, while certainly an emblematic feature of the *ancien régime*—though not, given Kabir's verse, unproblematically so—was solved by hook and by crook by the British in Bundelkhand in the early nineteenth century.¹¹⁹

I concluded the previous section by pointing to some ironies embedded in the history of Anupgiri's dealings with the British. But there is deeper

¹¹⁷ References has already been made to Bankim's *Anandamath*; see, as well, J. McLane, *Indian Nationalism and the Early Congress*, Princeton, 1977, esp. chapter 11, and Peter Hochs, *The Bomb in Bengal: The Rise of Revolutionary Terrorism in India, 1900–1910*, Delhi, 1994.

¹¹⁸ This verse is cited in Farquhar, 'The Fighting Ascetics of India', p. 439, Ghosh, *Sanyasi and Fakir Raiders in Bengal*, p. 13; and Lorenzen, 'Warrior Ascetics in Indian History', p. 61, who begins his essay with it. Lorenzen also points out that though the verse is included in the *Bijsak* of Kabir, it was probably composed after the 'first' battle of Panipat (1526) and the large-scale introduction of firearms into India. I have altered slightly the English rendering of the verse by Lorenzen.

¹¹⁹ By hook and by crook, but not once and for all: significantly, another, perhaps more coherently articulated (or at least more coherently remembered, given the importance of state-building for historical documentation and national memory) armed asceticism had begun to take political and territorial shape in the late 1790s in the Panjab (another important north Indian buffer region, in a game with greater stakes) under Ranjit Singh. The British would not have to deal with Sikh *khalsa* military culture until the 1830s, and the colonial solution to the problem that that martial identity posed for British Indian empire, for better or for worse, was to be found in the encouragement and co-optation of Sikh *khalsa* ideals into the culture of imperial arms. See McLeod, *Evolution of the Sikh Community*, cf. Richard Fox, *Loss of the Punjab. Culture in the Making*, Berkeley, 1985.

irony in the British solution to the problem of the armed ascetic: the more I reflect on Anupgiri's career and on armed ascetics in the transition to colonial rule, the more I come to realise that the Gosains of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century resembled no community so much as the men of the East India Company just prior to 1757—with their subcontinental trade networks, their fluidly cohesive identity, their considerable talent for intrigue and penchant for subterfuge, their substantial financial wherewithal and their military adaptability (including an ability to recruit widely)—perched unwittingly on the edge of subcontinental dominance. So familiar in 1800, they became each other's antithesis in the century to follow—to the extent that after 1880 the armed ascetic symbolised patriotic resistance to colonial rule until the rise (after 1920) of Gandhi's non-violent asceticism as part of a civilisational critique of the West.¹²⁰

Anupgiri's effectiveness as a military entrepreneur was predicated on his lifelong membership in the *akhara*. It conferred upon him key advantages in negotiating the treacherous political landscape of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. First, the *akhara* granted him access to a ready supply of trained and disciplined naga troops from a wide area—much wider than had been available to the average *jamadar* in the north Indian military labour market¹²¹—which he would gradually augment with more diverse Rajput and Hindustani numbers. Second, as a Dasnami Gosain he was connected to an array of Saiva monastic networks that could, if called upon, provide much in the way of useful political intelligence. Third, and perhaps most importantly, as an ascetic in pursuit of political power he was almost expected to behave in a shamelessly duplicitous manner. This is evident in Kabir's derisive verse, noted above, but emerges even more clearly in the portrayal of the archetypal political ascetic in Tulsidas' rewriting of the *Ramayana*. Tulsi's disdain for the politically motivated *tapasi* (lit., one who engages in *tapas*, ascetic concentration and heat generation) as a 'master of deceit' and 'scheming, guileful and hypocritical' is, as I have argued elsewhere, indicative of a broad shift in attitudes toward military asceticism in northern India since about 1600.¹²² And as any

¹²⁰ One could even argue that the potency of Gandhi's non-violent asceticism was dialectically dependent on martial (or violent) asceticism.

¹²¹ See Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy*.

¹²² For the verse translations, see W. Douglas P. Hill, *The Holy Lake of the Acts of Rama: An English Translation of Tulsi Das's Ramacaritamanasa*, Oxford, 1952, pp. 72–81; also useful, for comparing Hill to the Hindi original, is *Sri Ramacaritamanasa*, Gorakhpur, 1968, pp. 135–50. This derision occurs in portion of the *Balakanda* text where, roughly speaking, we would expect to learn about the travails of Vasishtha and Viswamitra—ancient sages skilled in the arts of war in Valmiki's *Ramayana*. A full discussion of these texts in relation to military asceticism can be found in my 'Subaltern *Sadhus*? Political Ascetics in Indian Myth, Memory, and History', Walter Hauser Festschrift, University of Virginia, 24–25 May 1997 (accessible on the web at <http://www.virginia.edu/~soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html>) See esp section 5, 'Discipline, Devotion, and the Ascetic Armed'.

student of late eighteenth century imperialism in India knows, shameless duplicity was the best way to get ahead.

This hard-headed approach to politics and military entrepreneurship is summed up in Umraogiri's ejaculation that 'he was no Motteseddy but a soldier', that 'he considered himself obliged to his sword for everything he held'. Implicit in the assertion, I have suggested, is a disdain for the constraints of caste identity. But being a soldiering gosain in the eighteenth century did not confer simply a lack of identity, it conferred elasticity of identity. Anupgiri deployed this ambiguous asceticism to full advantage, so that none of his eighteenth century contemporaries could pin him down. Whenever his fidelity to his patron was challenged, his immediate response was to offer to abandon all his wealth and weapons and retire to the banks of the Ganga to engage in prayer and mediation. For example, in 1785, when Anupgiri was at odds with Mahadji Shinde, J.W. Anderson (the British agent at Shinde's camp) reported:

Mahajee Sindia's suspicions of Himmud Behadre having been raised to a great height. He was yesterday induced to station parties of horse over his tents as a guard upon him. Himmud Behadre went immediately to the Durbar with a very small retinue, instead of the numerous armed attendants, with which he used of late to be accompanied, and after declaring to Sindia that he was determined to relinquish all worldly pursuits, and attach himself in future to the observances of religious duties he presented him with all the sunnuds he holds for his several possessions. Sindia after pausing a while returned the sunnuds and declared he had no other view in stationing of the horsemen round his tent, than to try his fidelity which he had now afforded him so ample a proof.¹²³

Tulsi's description of a good king, Pratapabhanu, completely taken in by the *tapasi*'s professions of humility, though composed almost two centuries earlier, serves as an appropriate commentary on Anupgiri's entrepreneurial style. Pratapabhanu praises the *tapasi* in unwittingly ironic terms:

Wise mystics like yourself, free from all self-conceit, habitually conceal their personality. Their highest good they find in the adoption of a lowly guise. That is why saints and scripture proclaim that the perfectly destitute are dear to *Hari* [God]. Mendicants like yourself, without money or home, raise doubts in the minds of Brahma and Siva. But whatever you may be, I reverence your feet; now, master, be gracious to me.

¹²³ J.W. Anderson to Hastings, Sindia's camp at Muttrah, dated 10 May (recorded in proceedings 26 May 1785), BSMC

This is followed by Tulsi's direct editorialising: 'The more the ascetic spoke of his detachment, the greater grew the king's belief in him. When the hypocritical ascetic saw that the king had submitted thought, word and deed to his influence, he said, "Brother, my name is *Ekatanu* [One-body]"'.¹²⁴ In his other words, only when the deception is complete does the power-hungry ascetic come into his own.

Despite his claims to the contrary, then, Anupgiri was anything but otherworldly. The British seem to have understood this—or perhaps they were simply less susceptible, given their status as relative outsiders, to the ascetic aura that surrounded him and the elasticity of identity it conferred. Indeed, Anupgiri himself may have sensed their insensitivity to his political idiom, and consequently decided to fall back on the simpler rhetoric of kingship and biology as a basis for political legitimacy in his dealings with them. In any case, the British were only too willing to grant him a sedentary retirement on the serene banks of the Ganga, to nudge him and his men toward the idealised, otherworldly sannyasi lifestyle evoked in Hastings' proclamation of 1773. Indologists wedded to the categorical separation of the Indian renouncer and the man-in-the-world—and to the fundamental individuality of the former and absence thereof in the latter—will protest that Anupgiri was not a true sannyasi renouncer and, hence, that his worldliness should not be seen as theoretically problematic.¹²⁵ In part, I agree: Anupgiri was not a typical ascetic. He certainly did not abandon the world for the life of a 'world renouncer'. Rather, he was abandoned by his destitute mother—for reasons that are forever lost to us—and cast into the world of ascetic soldiering. But he was an important kind of ascetic nevertheless and there were many who were much like him,¹²⁶ whether or not his actions were emblematic of individualistic ascetic agency in a world riven by caste and driven by dharma.

¹²⁴ Hill, *Holy Lake*, pp. 75–76

¹²⁵ See Louis Dumont, 'World Renunciation in Indian Religions', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, Vol. 4, 1960; later published as Appendix B to Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications*, rev. ed., Chicago, 1980, pp. 267–86

¹²⁶ It is impossible to say how many. Certainly he was not the first orphan to be 'adopted' by a sadhu and to become widely known for his activities on the margins of a monastic order. See my 'History, Devotion, and the Search for Nabhdas of Galta', presented at 'The Place of the Past: Uses of History in South Asia', School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 16–18 April 1997.

Book Reviews

G. BALACHANDRAN, *John Bullion's Empire: Britain's Gold Problem and India Between the Wars*, Curzon Press, Richmond, pp. xii + 252, 1996.

This work on monetary policy in interwar India argues the following thesis. 'Traditional accounts' of monetary policy in the interwar period see in London's attitude to India's monetary autonomy an element of aimless wavering, while devolution in fiscal and administrative matters proceeded on a steady course. Though late, monetary autonomy did come, in a clean manner, after London skilfully guided India out of the worst part of the Great Depression (p. 215). Against this story, the book argues that Indian monetary policy was consistently motivated by the need for stabilisation in Britain and by what key institutions and individuals in London believed were the hazards India posed to the performance of this task. The resultant actions, which were favourable for Britain or thought to be such, were consistently adverse for India, in the sense of being anti-expansionary in intent, even during the Depression. As for devolution, it did happen in the mid-1930s, but as 'the outcome of a dismal process of intrigue' (p. 216), and inspired by London's need for subtler instruments of control.

Students of monetary history of interwar India are familiar with elements of this counter-argument. But this is the first time the elements are interwoven to create a compelling story. The quality of historical research is superior to that of the accounts now available. In terms of facts, theory and comparative history, the story is richer. And it has been told exceptionally well.

The story, in somewhat greater detail, is as follows. India played a counter-cyclical role in the world economy. This role was mediated by the Indians' hunger for gold. In a world characterised by fixed exchange rates and, directly or indirectly, gold as a main item of reserves, expansions led to India absorbing non-monetary gold at the expense of monetary gold elsewhere. During and after the First World War, faced with trade and liquidity problems at home and the fear that Indian gold appetite might upset the

adjustment process, British authorities restrained expansionary tendencies in India by means of manipulation of the exchange rate and Indian reserves. The justification for such actions, however, was usually made via a discourse that obscured the real reason, and highlighted presumed advantages for India. Underlying such discourses were often untested models of gold demand.

The book describes in detail five episodes illustrating how this logic worked. The first concerns Britain's strained balance of payments with the USA during the First World War, leading to adjustments in her transactions with India and to expansion of less liquid assets in Indian currency reserves. The second deals with silver inflation immediately after the war. Convertibility of the rupee with silver was seen as priority, and induced revaluation. Revaluation, in turn, was likely to alter the relative price of gold (world in relation to domestic) in favour of import. But it was also deflationary and might have an adverse income effect on gold demand. In practice, direct checks on gold import, persistence with overvalued rupee and capital flight combined to achieve both convertibility and limited gold absorption, at the cost of contraction. Interestingly, in the most important official statements, the contraction was justified on grounds of dealing with inflation, a politically handy argument adapted from Keynes' evidence at the Babbington-Smith Committee. The third episode is the managed float of the rupee in the mid-1920s. The book attributes the persistence with an 18d. rupee to Britain's dependence on expansion in the rest of the world, especially the USA, for her own adjustments, and the belief that Indian gold absorption needed to be checked to achieve this aim. The fourth episode is the Depression, similar in logic but more intense in impact, and, the fifth, the transfer of control from London to the Reserve Bank of India.

The thesis being strong and persuasive, it invites creative debates. In my case, there was mild dissatisfaction with the treatment of the imperial world-view. The two key elements in this world-view were (a) India must assist British adjustments, and (b) India was different. One part of the book's argument, that India was politically constrained to assist British adjustments, is acceptable. But the second part leads to further questions. Was India really different in her choice of assets? Were the fears about her justified? Were Indian and British expansion vitally in conflict? If they were, officers in London can be seen to have been impelled by the peculiarity of India as much as by her colonial status. There is nothing in the book to suggest a negative answer to these questions, or to suggest that official theorisation about Indian asset behaviour were wrong. More broadly, the book reveals a weakness of the discipline itself. In Indian monetary history, there is a kind of breach between analysis of policy and analysis of the structural-behavioural characteristics of the economy. The former has far out-developed the latter. In minor ways, the breach reappears in discussions on themes such as the Depression. On this episode, the book follows a

practice in Indianist Depression scholarship to lament the gold exports of the early 1930s. But gold was primarily a hoard. If it was sold, no matter the reason and no matter whether there was aggregate net dissaving or not, it should mean easier conversion of asset into credit.

These reactions are not meant to limit the basic argument of the book, but to suggest that further research on economic structure may add certain necessary perspectives to policy analysis. In terms of what it set out to achieve, the book can be expected to become not only an influential work on Indian monetary history, but also a major reference on the subject.

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VASUDHA DALMIA, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bharatendu Harischandra and Nineteenth-century Banaras*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997, pp. xii + 490, Rs 575.

Scholarship on Banaras is typically of two kinds: one that is dominated by the 'holy city' image or that otherwise finds Banaras extraordinary, and the other that uses it almost casually as a site for exemplifying a broader argument, such as regarding communalism, historiography or modernisation. Dalmia's strength lies in that she escapes both these extremes, and presents a narrative of social history rooted in the city but without mystifying it. Her weakness lies partly in that she does not adequately read the textuality of the city and takes many 'facts' at face value.

The beginning of the book is not as eloquent as the rest of it. Dalmia engages in, as she describes it, 'a lengthy tussle' with others' theses, which leaves one unaroused since we have not yet been familiarised with Dalmia's own arguments or data. Then, there is a serious discussion of tradition, modernity, reform, renaissance, consolidation, nationalist discourse and many 'idioms', which apparently are subjects in their own right—a common and eminently avoidable literary habit of authors—with the ability to form, group, consolidate, attempt, present and seek. That the book is going to 'embed and contextualise the traditionalist response of Harischandra and his contemporaries' is unfortunately kept for the last, briefest paragraph of the Introduction.

As promised, the argument is then contextualised in three well-written chapters, chapter 3 on Banaras, chapter 4 on Hindi, and chapter 6 on Hinduism. The tendency to dilute her own thesis with discussions of others' arguments (in the main body of the text) persists, in one of which the interesting point is raised that the category of 'power' must not be depoliticised. She chooses to analyse power by looking at the practices of 'three

power-holding traditions', the Rajas, the merchants, and the Pandits. Through their cooperation with the British and their patronage of convention and ritual, the Rajas created a base for modern Hinduism (p. 82). The merchants spearheaded the demand for Hindi as the official language, they participated in Dharma Sabhas, and their sectarian Vaisnava societies 'formed the core of the traditionalist rearticulation of Hinduism' (p. 94). The learned Brahmans (or Pandits as they may preferably be called) sought their livelihood under the British or in new institutions, and found their knowledge marginalised—thus, while defending 'tradition', redefined it. These three 'strands' interacted with the British, were patronised by the government, and could not or did not remain 'immune' to its influence. Dalmia's caveats notwithstanding, the choice of metaphors and the structure or narrative gives an impression of an over-literal reading of 'power', and of the political calculations that produce change in civil society.

It is difficult to pinpoint which theory of change we are operating with here. Two questions especially arise. Given the smooth processes described by Dalmia, one feels tempted to presume that such were the processes that characterised Banaras *throughout* its history. Was there nothing new, no new meaning or deployment of power in the nineteenth century? Or was this all new, in which case, what was the motor of change? The conceptual apparatus of the book is transparently Hegelian. Two 'idioms', the British-derived and the classical Aryan-Hindu derived, in a dynamic combination both conflictual and collaborative, gave birth to a third 'idiom', 'which then included both the traditional and reformist formulations' (p. 431). Dalmia's preferred metaphor, the 'coining' of 'idioms', is intriguing, suggesting in turn a functionalist and a culturalist interpretation.

Second, power was wielded by these three forces and disseminated throughout India by pilgrims. But in Banaras itself, the exercise of power was presumably hegemonic. How else could thousands of people be collected for river festivals and Ramlilas? The three elite groups described do not add up to the total of Banaras' society, nor can they be claimed to have effected a redefinition of 'Hinduism' if they each acted only within their group. Presuming that Hindu cultural practices were shared across classes at one time, and merchants and Pandits defined their new quasi-modernist idioms as documented, did 'lower classes', that is, the majority of the population, fall into line with these redefinitions, and what was the power mechanism that made this possible? Alternatively, what was the group identity of lower classes and the nature of *their* power, and therefore, the nature of the new popular Hinduism? This is linked to the separate, unasked question of the possible understandings of religion as meaning and as discourse. The Maharaja, the Pandits, the merchants—all found it appropriate to redefine their beliefs, but there is a hidden suggestion of involuntarism throughout, of a non-reflexivity, of being subjected to circumstances, such as to new institutions like the Benares Institute (pp. 114–17).

The discussion of the development of Hindi as the language of the Hindus is less of a narrative and more problematised (as well as containing the solitary reference to women, in the context of 'women's language' (p. 220), apart from, of course, that the Bharatendu's paramours). But the indifference to material circumstances (production, economy) that characterise the analysis of the elites is present here as well, compensate by attention to the affects of technology: the press, the school, and the market.

What is valuable about the book makes sense at last, although it is stated by Dalmia in the Introduction. The theoretical perspective informing this study is that of *narrative* history, as opposed to the more easily placeable (but not necessarily superior) Marxist, modernist culturalist, or discourse analysis perspectives. The narrative of history, in the details of its account of successive formations, conceptual and institutional, and their interaction with events and personalities, through its internal unspecified logic leads to a certain result. This is what gives the storytelling style to the book (the tussle with theorists aside), its weighty detail, its air of revelation—and the complete absence of the author.

This is not simply a book about the now-familiar story of how multifarious practices got rudely amalgamated into one unified version of 'Hinduism', nor is it a denouement of the construction of this '-ism' for material or discursive power, nor yet is it a deconstruction of the texts of a towering literary personality. This is a social history which takes facts seriously, and in the breadth of its vision and the empathy it displays with actors in the past, is a very unusual piece of work given the trends in history writing today. And it is of value as a thoughtfully researched, clearly written social history, as many exemplars of the new trends are not.

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JOHN KEEGAN, *A History of Warfare*, Vintage, New York, 1994, pp. xvi + 432, Special Indian Price Rs 400.

GEOFFREY PARKER, ed., *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Warfare: The Triumph of the West*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, pp. viii + 408, Special Indian Price Rs 950.

CHARLES TOWNSHEND, ed., *The Oxford Illustrated History of Modern War*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997, pp. xii + 354, Price not stated.

At present we are living under the western dominance. How was it possible for the West, initially deficient in economic and demographic

resources vis-à-vis Asia, to construct global hegemony? And when exactly did the transition to western supremacy occur? In the 1970s, scholars harped on capitalism to explain the rise of the West. However, such interpretation smacks of economism. In the early modern age, West Europe experienced a qualitative and quantitative transformation in the techniques for conducting warfare. This gave her the tools to control the extra-European world. So this military metamorphosis must be located not only in the context of the transition debate (shift to European supremacy), but also at the interface of imperialism and colonialism. The three books under review attempt to analyse the genesis of the unique western method of warfare.

There are certain similarities and dissimilarities in the methodologies of John Keegan's *A History of Warfare*, Geoffrey Parker's edited *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Warfare* (hereafter *CIHW*) and Charles Townshend's edited *The Oxford Illustrated History of Modern War* (hereafter *OIHW*). All the three books agree that war was the principal arbiter in the evolution of civilisation and modern war (that is, the western way of warfare) emerged in central and north-west Europe. The three books chart the trajectory of the western military method as a unilinear process which reached in peak in 1945. While Keegan and Townshend accept that Renaissance marked the beginning of western warfare, Parker traces it back to classical Europe. Credit is due to Keegan for giving equal importance to different forms of non-western organised conflicts. This is because he, unlike Parker, does not assume that the western method of organised killing was always superior. So, in Keegan's format, western warfare does not deserve greater attention. All the three authors follow a bipolar paradigm. They divide the world into two exclusive zones—Orient and Occident. For Parker and Townshend, the western military tradition was a technological-organisational combine. However, Keegan assumes western war-making as a cultural construct. Finally, the influence of an interdisciplinary approach is clear in the *History of Warfare* and the *CIHW*; while Parker's paradigm is influenced by biology, Keegan's outlook is shaped by anthropology.

Keegan fuses the two problematics—how different types of men fought, with why men fought. This lands him on the nature versus nurture debate current among anthropologists. Keegan approaches war as a cultural activity. He writes that culture determined the face of combat and politics and technology were subordinate to culture. Culture for him included taboos, customs and traditions. Unlike the radical culturologists such as Margaret Mead, Keegan does not accept Rousseau's thesis that aggression is merely a cultural invention and an aberration. Rather, writes Keegan, warfare was integral in the evolution of history. Like J. Haas and W. Creamer, Keegan could be categorised as a cultural Darwinist: warfare was not an accident but a necessity.

Keegan makes a telling point by arguing that western warfare was merely one of the approaches for organised slaughter. The philosophy behind this was not universally applicable spatially and temporally, because it was rooted in a particular politico-military context compressed within a narrow geographical space. The ideological father of western warfare is Clausewitz. Keegan's contribution lies in contextualising Clausewitzian philosophy. Regiments and centralised states, the two distinct features of the West European landscape circumscribed Clausewitz's thinking. In Clausewitz's theory, politics, and not culture, shaped warfare. Keegan writes that Clausewitz's notion about the supremacy of politics was the lineal descendant of enlightenment philosophy. Then, Clausewitz was rabidly Eurocentric, which in turn was derived from Voltaire. Clausewitz's *On War*, claims Keegan, cannot explain the military formations outside Europe because the self-proclaimed philosopher failed to study the Mamluks, the Samurais, etc. Hence, concludes Keegan, western military philosophy was parochial. Thus, Keegan is against any attempt to construct a grand theory for explaining everything. This raises a basic question relevant for all the disciplines of social sciences—how far could theories rooted in the western context be used to explain the non-western scenarios.

What, then, was exactly Clausewitz's interpretation of the western military tradition? The chief characteristic of western warfare was complete destruction of the enemy's combat forces in the battle-zones. Complete annihilation of the enemy by the westerners in decisive battles was possible, writes Keegan, because the Europeans were willing to stand and fight till death. The fusion of this sort of battlefield behaviour with gunpowder weapons in the sixteenth century gave global supremacy to the Europeans. How does one explain the distinct western military ethos of fighting pitched battles till death? Keegan takes the aid of psychology to explain the varied western mental make-up. He writes that before the dawn of history, simultaneous tribal migrations occurred in opposite directions from the Danubian region. The tribes who colonised the Middle East and India were from east of Danube, and they preferred evasive tactics, that is, harrying the enemy from a distance with missile weapons like the bow. But the tribes which moved from the west bank of Danube into Germany and Greece, the forefathers of present-day Europeans, liked to engage in decisive battles. Why did the *mentalités* of the tribes of eastern and western banks of Danube differ? Keegan has no answer. And this is the principal fault of his book.

Military cultures of the different ethnic groups were not autonomous variables as Keegan seems to think, but were a complex amalgam of geography, politics and institutions. To give an example, Maratha military culture in the early eighteenth century was geared towards guerrilla warfare because the hilly terrain of Maharashtra favoured it. In the 1790s, the Marathas acquired western technology and the central government was able to impose some degree of control over the autonomous jagridars.

Then the Maratha military outlook registered a shift and they were willing to offer pitched battles to their adversaries.

So, the cultural approach to warfare is inadequate for clarifying the transition to the western military ascendancy. The *CIHW* and the *OIHW*, with the aid of organisational theory (emphasis on bureaucratic changes and technical transition for explaining transformation of the military institutions), try to grapple with the problematic. The three essays of Parker in the *CIHW* categorise the post-Renaissance European military changes as a military 'revolution'. Jeremy Black and Martin Van Creveld in their essays in the *OIHW* accept the profundity of the military transformation but prefer to label it as military 'evolution'. The *CIHW* and *OIHW* offer us snapshots of the most lively debate which is going on among military historians.

Michael Roberts (in 1955) introduced the concept of a military 'revolution' as a framework for tracing the rise of modern war in Europe. In 1976, Parker revised Roberts' thesis. Roberts' emphasis was on Sweden in the Thirty Years War. Parker expanded the geographical and temporal span of the military 'revolution', and he focused on the Spanish empire in Flanders. Roberts had written that the Swedish King Gustavus Adolphus' tactical reforms triggered a chain reaction. He deployed infantry armed with muskets in a linear formation which drove away feudal cavalry armed with lances. Infantry was cheaper and quicker to raise than the aristocratic cavalry. So the armies' sizes all over Europe registered a quantum jump. The key determinant in initiating the military 'revolution' for Roberts was *tactics*, but for Parker it was *technology*. Parker found a challenge-response dynamic among the European military establishments. Once a new weapon system came into existence, a counter-weapon evolved to stall its effect and this cycle continued. Hence, it resulted in the continuous upgradation of the western war machines unlike the non-western armies which stagnated. Gunpowder gave rise to a new type of siege artillery which blasted the medieval castles. In response to it evolved a new type of fortress—*trace italienne*. The new type of forts forced innovations among the attacking infantry—they were armed with handguns and supported by field artillery. Parker's intervention in 1988 links the military 'revolution' of West Europe with the growth of the western military supremacy in the extra-European world. He continues that when the firepower-heavy and disciplined western infantry was imported to Afro-Asia, the tribal-feudal armies of the 'Third World' collapsed.

Two scholars incorrectly interpret Parker as a technological determinist. Parker never uses the Renaissance military technology as an explanatory blackbox. In his paradigm, gunpowder started the military 'revolution' but it was not the principal or ultimate factor as the course of the revolution was shaped by the managerial expertise of the European states. Parker makes

clear that the Chinese also had firearms, but due to bureaucratic bunglings, Peking failed to sustain technological modifications of its arsenal.

The military revolution paradigm started facing challenges in the 1990s. Black questions the utility of the term 'revolution' for categorising what he visualises as slow incremental changes in the western armed forces across a span of several centuries. Second, Black argues that any attempt to construct a universal military 'revolution' model is anachronistic because such an overarching paradigm does not take into account local strategic-ecological factors. A Polish historian, Wiesław Majewski, has developed this point. Poland faced mobile Tatar cavalry. Against them, slow-moving firepower-intensive infantry was useless. In the sparsely populated vast spaces of East Europe, urban centres were rare. So neither the western artillery fortress nor the siege armies (chief ingredients of the military 'revolution') developed east of Elbe. Majewski's most vital contribution is to point out the tactical inputs of the East European warfare to the western art of war. The divisional system of the Polish army was adopted by the French. It is unfortunate that this vital feedback loop between the core area of the military transformation and the periphery is passed over by Parker in the *CIHW*, and his other writings.

Parker, in response to Black's conceptual criticism regarding the term 'revolution', writes that the Industrial Revolution also spanned across several centuries. However, Clifford J. Rogers introduces a new framework for rejuvenating Parker's hypothesis. He assumes that rather than one military 'revolution', a series of military revolutions occurred. And in between the 'revolutions' occurred 'evolutions', that is, slow and steady changes. First occurred an infantry revolution, which in turn produced the fortress revolution. Before the artillery revolution (1420–40s), evolution in artillery design occurred between 1300–1400. This innovative framework which accommodates both Parker's 'revolution' and Black's 'evolution', was, in Rogers' phrase, the Punctuated Equilibrium model. It is borrowed from Stephen J. Gould and Niles Eldredge who evolved it to challenge the concept of Gradualism for understanding the evolution of species. In his rejoinder, Parker toys with this model but finally accepts it in the *CIHW*.

Beside this conceptual readjustment, what is new in the *CIHW*? In this book, unlike his other works, Parker traces back the western warfare (which according to him gained global supremacy due to the military revolutions between 1500 and 1800) to the Greco-Roman world. He accepts Victor Davis Hanson's view that decisive battles in which the Europeans annihilated the enemy's combat forces in single afternoons were invented by the Greeks. With due respect to Hanson, one must remember that heavy infantry, one of the crucial elements for conducting decisive set-piece encounters, was first invented by the Sumerians. The Greeks imitated

the phalanx from them. Then the significant decisive encirclement battle (Cannae) was engineered by Hannibal against the Romans. In India, the three Panipat battles were pitched encounters where the fate of empires were decided in single afternoons. So to give the Greeks credit for inventing this dogma of annihilation is unjust.

Both the *CIHW* and the *OIHW* agree that the West experienced continuous technological improvements in military matters for the last 400 years, but disagree on the pace of change. Parker visualises the process as characterised by occasional rapid outbursts. Townshend instead sees it as a slow linear growth. What was the secret behind continuous technical growth in the West unlike in Ming China or Mughal India? Parker asserts that it was because of political fragmentation in Europe. This, however, is not an original point as Paul Kennedy has already raised it. Another factor in Parker's frame for continuous technical developments of the western armies was the operation of the challenge-response dynamic. Every symmetrical military innovation produced another asymmetrical counter-weapon. This, claims Parker, was possible because of the presence of strong states which were capable of funding the increasingly costly military technologies. What produced strong states in the West? In his 1988 work, Parker, like Roberts, argued that the growth in the size of the armies created administrative revolutions in the polities. However, in response to I.A.A. Thompson's criticism that the increase in the scope and scale of warfare decentralised the relatively stable Spanish monarchy, Parker steps down his claim. In his rejoinder, Parker agrees that the emergence of the strong states and the occurrence of the military revolution was simultaneous and the relation between them was dialectical. Parker's assumption that the free market economy of the West unlike the command economies of the Asian land empires made possible continuous economic, and hence technological, progress, is influenced by McNeill.

M. Van Creveld instead comes up with an original argument in the *OIHW*. He writes that continuous rise in the lethality of the western military technologies was due to the introduction of permanent standing armies. The military bureaucracies provided a stable administrative framework for sustained technical improvements. In the pre-1500 mercenary armies which were raised *ad hoc* during emergencies and disbanded in peacetime, continuous and expensive long-term research in weapons was impossible. This is an important intervention as M. Van Creveld's argument applies equally to the Afro-Asian militias which lacked the administrative institutions for harnessing technologies.

To sum up, the military revolution concept has sustained the attacks and retains its position as a principal explanatory category for charting the transition from medievalism to the modern age in Europe. But if it has to function as an analytical tool for world history, then the non-western

theatres must be given equal importance. If the focus shifts away from Europe, then only it will be clear which aspects of the military revolutions were crucial for the various parts of the globe. Then the analysis of the colonial encounters will throw the European chronology of the military revolutions in doubt. There is no uniform and universal timeframe for the military revolutions. Central America, for example, experienced the effect of the western military transformation between 1500 and 1600 and technology (swords plus firearms) gave Spain supremacy over the Aztecs. India suffered the effects of the revolutionary western armies between 1750 and 1850 and the principal parameter in such conflicts was logistics. Further, colonial warfare also influenced the configuration of western warfare. Wellington's tactical disposition of infantry in squares, which gave him victory at Waterloo, was first implemented by the Duke against the Marathas at the Battle of Assaye in the Second Anglo-Maratha War. So, the western military tradition in Europe cannot be properly grasped without taking into consideration the colonial dimension. And in this task both the *CIHW* and the *OIHW* fail miserably.

Rather than culture, the military revolution framework offers us a more concrete paradigm to flesh out the shifts in the global military balance. Unfortunately, the *CIHW* and the *OIHW* have hardly anything new but contain synopsis of the views developed by the experts in their specialist works. Though warfare has frequently punctuated history, its study remains marginal. The two books, the *CIHW* and the *OIHW*, which include essays by eminent historians, will probably dissipate the historiographical bias against warfare. A plea for military history might raise a cynical smile among the readers of this journal. The study of warfare in India as part of the land conflicts along the vast seam of Eurasia will go a long way in integrating Indian history as part of Eurasian history and will open up new vistas. For this we need *longue durée* histories of Indian armies and warfare like the books reviewed in this essay. And this is yet to be done.

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CHARLES MALAMOURD, *Cooking the World: Ritual and Thought in Ancient India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1996, translated from the French by David White (French Studies in South Asian Culture and Society), pp. viii + 354, Rs 550.

Cooking the World is an anthology of 15 articles which were originally written and published in French between 1968 and 1987. A renowned Sanskritist,

the author explores a variety of themes ranging from the ubiquitous notion of sacrifice and its ramifications, to definitions and strategies of seduction, and the interplay between memory and love.

Malamoud's analysis of sacrifice operates at a number of levels. In some cases, themes are explored within a single sacrifice. For instance, he meticulously reconstructs the symbolism associated with numbers, both cardinal and ordinal, and the varied means of representing them in the *dvādaśāha* or twelve-day *soma* sacrifice—through invoking specific deities, using certain rhythmic metres, and/or verses containing words which are assigned a numeric value, uncovering meanings in what might otherwise appear arbitrary or even absurd.

In other instances, certain ritual ideas are traced through a range of sacrifices. These include the treatment of the sacrificial victim, where literal dismemberment is accompanied by symbolic reconstruction. Elsewhere, the author focuses on concepts which are explored through both ritual and non-ritual texts. For instance, space or emptiness is negotiated ritually through the construction of the sacrificial altar, especially in the *agnicayana*. It is also a central component in philosophical speculation about the *ātman/brahman*.

Some of the essays examine the connection between Vedic and Puranic ideas. Here, the notion of a sharp contrast between the two is implicitly questioned. For example, the conventional view that, unlike their Puranic counterparts, the Vedic gods were conceived of as aniconic is qualified by drawing attention to the traces of iconism within the Vedic tradition, to the substantiality of gods like Agni and Soma (represented by the sacrificial fires and plant respectively) and to the anthropomorphic conceptualisation of the gods.

The relationship between the *grāma* (village, defined in terms of people or community rather than territory) and the *araṇya* (forest or the 'other') is also traced through a range of texts—the Vedas, *Āraṇyakas*, *Upaniṣads*, culminating in Kālidāsa's *Kumārasambhava*. One again, the emphasis is on subtle continuities rather than obvious disjunctures.

It is this quest for underlying unities beneath apparent diversities which is developed in the title essay, 'Cooking the World'. Here, the preparation of the sacrificial offering is equated with a cosmogonic act. At another level, routine, domestic cooking and the offering of food is also defined as a sacrifice. The idiom of sacrificial cooking is extended to other occasions, including marriage, where the bride is equated with the sacrificial victim.

Other essays deal with more classical themes such as the *puruṣārthas*, where the author charts out the complex interrelationship amongst the four aims of a man's life as envisaged within the Sanskritic tradition, and the notion of *daṇḍa* or punishment. Malamoud deftly juxtaposes *daṇḍa*, defined as state-administered, regulated violence, and somewhat inevitably equated with sacrifice, with revenge viewed as counter-productive within the logic

of *karma*—revenge, when successful, leads to the accumulation of a negative *karmic* balance.

The author explicitly identifies the subjects of these essays as 'truly Indian' (p. 1). Equally explicit is his attempt to understand them through an analysis of Sanskrit, more specifically, Vedic texts. Given the author's encyclopaedic knowledge of the texts, the outcome is fascinating and insightful. The reader is guided through classical literature, myths, legends, ritual and non-ritual prescriptions and etymological speculation with felicity.

Nevertheless, certain problems of definition and context remain unresolved. Many readers are likely to feel uncomfortable with the tendency to universalise Vedic or even Sanskrit traditions into an Indian tradition. Implicit in this is a reluctance to historicise the traditions.

The author is sensitive to the fact that some of the notions developed within the tradition were exclusive rather than inclusive. He recognises, for instance, that the three debts to the *devas*, *ṛsis*, and *pitṛs* could not have been rapid by *śūdras*, who were excluded from the sacrificial tradition. Yet, the implications of such exclusions are not worked out. Even more striking, given the author's understanding of (sacrificial) ritual as cooking, involving transformations for both the sacrificer and sacrificial substances, and of the corresponding ritualisation of cooking, is the absence of any discussion on the implications of such ritualisation for women, who would have functioned as cooks in most routine, day-to-day situations.

Besides, well-documented, alternative traditions are excluded from the discussion. Buddhism evidently figured somewhat obliquely in the French version, represented by a reproduction of Paul Klee's *Friendly Gaze*, which was supposed to hint at Piyadassi, the title adopted by Ashoka in his inscriptions. Even this symbolic gesture is absent in the English translation. Jainism evidently did not merit even this attention.

Some of the questions the author focuses on, including those of violence/non-violence and renunciation and its implications would have been enriched by a consideration of such alternative traditions. In fact, they raised and attempted to resolve these issues in varied ways. The later Sanskrit tradition, in particular, can be interpreted in terms of a response to such alternatives. This would have provided a more nuanced and less static understanding of the 'Indian'.

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DESIDERIO PINTO, *Piri-Muridi Relationship: A Study of the Nizamuddin Dargah*, Manohar Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 1995, pp. vii + 346, Rs 450.

A *tariqa* is, properly speaking, a 'way' leading to God, and it possesses a transcendental character, constituted by spiritual transmission of *baraka* (grace). One who commits oneself to a *tariqa* is a *salik*—literally a 'traveller'—who aims at union with God. Travelling along this path is full of perils and the wayfarer can progress only under the direction of a *murshid* (guide) who is well acquainted with the 'way', is possessor of *walayat* (sainthood) and *tasarruf* (spiritual efficacy). This circumstances necessitates an intense relationship between the *murid*—one who desires, and the *murshid* who is the *murad* or object of former's desire. This relationship between the *pir* or *murshid* and the *murid* is central to Sufism and reflects the transcendental as well as the organisational aspects of the *tariqa*.

The present monograph is a sociological study of *piri-muridi* relationship as observed at the *dargah* (tomb shrine) of a fourteenth century Delhi-based Chishti Sufi, Nizamuddin Awliya. The method and theoretical perspective used by the author to enable a sociological description of *piri-muridi*, as discussed in his Introduction, is based on Bryan Turner's *Weber and Islam*. Within this framework, religion is not a cognitive system, but a system whose working is similar to the human social system. Religion, like the human social system, uses language and dominant patterns to describe roles of and interaction with supernatural actors. The mode of interaction between human and supernatural actors is indirect and is expressed in terms of typifications and stereotypes. Typifications define the type of God that is encountered in religious experience and the sort of relationship that the human actor can expect of such a God, and the forms of interactional styles appropriate to Him.

One such typification is the mystical theosophy of the great Shaikh, Ibn 'Arabi. In Section One of this monograph, the author has examined this mystical social system in which God may be approached in two ways: as God in Himself as an unknowable Being, and as God the social actor who is knowable/observable at different planes of existence. A perfect social actor in this mystical social system is called the Perfect Man who is the microcosmic representation of the macrocosm, or is the mirror image of God the social actor. Wayfarers of the mystic path strive for such a perfection by effacing their personal ego, will and desire. *Piri-muridi* is an institutionalised form of socialisation that forces the *murid* to give up his ego so that he can take a new awareness of manifesting God. Within the *pir-murid* relation, this is achieved through a rigorous process of initiation and training in Sufi conduct by the *pir*, and the *murid*'s realisation that the *pir* is the official locus of self-manifestation of God the social actor.

The second section of this monograph elaborates the nature of *piri-muridi* as observed in the *dargah* of Nizamuddin Awliya. Based on the data collected from respondents, Pinto has provided definitions and typologies of *pirs* and *murids*, their characteristic practices, rituals and modes of social interaction. This interaction progresses from the sphere of the *murid*'s mundane concerns of daily living like issues of family, health and economic well-being, to higher spiritual matters of progression along the mystic path. The *pir* attends to the former problems by prescribing *ta'wiz* (amulet), *zikr* (invocatory formula), *wazifa* (recitation, believed to result in observable effects of the name that is recited), or simply tenders good advice to his disciple. Regarding spiritual concerns, the author has identified five stages within the *pir-murid* relationship which aims towards realisation of union with God. The first stage involves choosing of a *pir*. In the second stage, the *murid* is initiated into the *tariqa* by a particular *pir*. This is followed by a stage in which the *murid* realises that his *pir* is an official locus of self-manifestation of God. In the fourth stage, the former emulates the latter to the extent of manifesting him. Finally, the *murid* learns to see all things as *pirs*, as the loci of self-manifestation of God.

In the author's understanding, works on Sufism do not contain more than 'passing references to *piri-muridi*' (p. 318). This, however, reflects Pinto's lack of familiarity with Sufi sources. The process of socialisation described by him is, in some ways, a less complex version of the same discussed in Sufi sources. In Sufi *rasail* (treatises), special sections are often devoted to principles and practices of *piri-muridi*. Further, references concerning relational aspects of *piri-muridi* are a frequent occurrence in Sufi *malfuzat* (discourses), *maktubat* (letters) and *tazkirat* (biographies). For example, Shihabuddin Suhrawardi's '*Awarif al Ma'arif*' is the prototype of rule for Sufi orders, including the *Chishtiyya*, since the thirteenth century. Other than the *bai'at* (pledge of allegiance) mentioned by Pinto, there are two other ritual modes of initiation—the inculcation of *zikr* and investiture with the *khirqa-i-irada* (initiatic robe)—recommended in the '*Awarif*'. The rites of initiation could vary in different *silsilas* (initiatic chains) and could comprise more than one mode. One wonders if *bai'at* was the only form of initiation among the earliest *Chishtiyya*, and whether *piri-muridi* has evolved in response to the changing circumstance over the past few centuries? Perhaps, a comparative study of early Chishti sources with actual practices as observed in Chishti shrines, like Nizamuddin's, could provide some interesting answers.

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HARISH C. SHARMA, *Artisans of the Punjab: A Study of Social Change in Historical Perspective 1849–1947*, Manohar Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 1996, pp. 167.

This book deals with an important and under-researched subject, artisans in colonial India. A large component of rural and urban economies, artisans were affected very deeply by macro-economic changes in the nineteenth century such as commercialisation of agriculture, competition from machinery, growth of factories, the railways and the prospect of long-distance migration. Yet, they have been studied, at least in the context of major regional economies, only indirectly, and therefore, in insufficient detail. The book addresses this gap, and the outcome is a very useful contribution to the study of both traditional industry and regional history, in this case the history of colonial Punjab.

The substantive part of the book begins with a chapter on the 'traditional socio-economic set-up', or the *sepi*, a term covering a range of customary barter transactions between the landed people on the one hand, and manufacturers or suppliers of service on the other. The description is adequate, and at times striking. For example, payment rates show how hierarchy was built in customary transactions. The leather workers formed one-sixteenth of the population of Punjab but usually received one-fortieth of the crop. The book then proceeds to analyse demographic data of the censuses, and produces an interesting finding. Over 1911–21 and 1921–31, growth rate of artisan population (in this case, seven most numerous castes) was below that of the general population. It is suggested that artisans were poorer and thus had higher mortality than the general population. This is open to question. Over 1881–91 and 1891–1901, the ranking of growth rates was the reverse. Several of the early twentieth century demographic trends, in fact, seem attributable to migration out of Punjab, a theme not pursued in the book.

The rest of the book discusses broad macro-economic processes and how they affected the main caste-cum-occupations. These processes include dispersal of the population especially towards the 'canal colonies' from the late nineteenth century, competition from machinery and factory, decline of *sepi*, spread of education and social movements, broad occupational changes such as the entry of artisanal groups into public works and agriculture, etc. These processes created new opportunities for some artisans, and threatened the livelihood of some others. Based on some current surveys, one chapter describes profiles of social mobility among erstwhile lowly placed groups.

The book, thus, points out important general tendencies. It, however, under-explores these tendencies possibly because it underestimates the breadth of the subject. Thus, rural artisans receive greater space and more convincing treatment in the book than the urban. Institutional complexities

of the urban artisanate are simplified. An example is the treatment of *baqi* or advances taken by hired workers. Seen here as a sign of bondage, *baqi* was at times a customary entitlement of workers and a bargaining issue. There is little discussion of wage labour and skilled labour within the older manufactures. The presence of machinery is seen as generally impairing. This holds, partially, for textiles. But in all other industries, machinery played a more mixed and indirect role. There is a similar negative view on the factory, but sources suggest that many urban artisans themselves set up factories. It is mentioned that *sepi* did not cover all transactions and left a space for market-like exchange. How were terms arrived at in this sphere? The 'field-work' used in the book needed more description, and its object, study of 'social mobility', a clearer definition.

To conclude, it needs to be said that while the book does not answer several basic questions, it does enable their asking. In this respect, it is a valuable work.

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BRUCE G. TRIGGER and WILCOMB E. WASHBURN, eds, *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas*, Volume I, *North America*, Parts I & II, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, pp. xix + 564 (Part I); pp. xix + 500 (Part II).

The *Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas*, Vol. I, in two parts, is a significant contribution to the study of indigenous people who had lived in North America much before the Europeans 'conquered' the continent and established their colonial rule. It is a valuable comprehensive history of the Native peoples, which discusses the responses of these people to the environmental diversity of North America, their reactions and challenges to the different colonial regimes and the independent national governments that have established themselves in recent times.

There have been many other histories on the Native peoples, for instance, the multi-volume *Handbook of North American Indians* and other monographs which discuss tribal histories. However, the value of this volume is enhanced by its approach and divergent themes—cultural, political, economic—relating to the Native peoples. It reinforces and reiterates the change in American historiography. Scholars are no longer engaged in writing ultra-patriotic histories like George Bancroft, or writing in celebration of American democracy, or simply writing 'white history'. Such histories, it is convincingly substantiated and reconfirmed, are outdated. Ethnic history and history of social groups have occupied the scholars of

American history not only in recent years but such is its appeal that it is definitely here to stay. It is the candid understanding and critique of American capitalism and American democracy rather than its euphoristic defence which now encapsulates American history. And this volume more than supports it.

The volume, however, does not present any hypothesis based on original research. This is in the tradition of other Cambridge history volumes. It is a synthesis of existing research on Native American history and an attempt to consolidate present knowledge to remove the biases towards the Natives and their history. To provide an exhaustive analysis of Native history but also to encourage relativism and alternative histories in view of post-modernist theories, the volume has sought to represent divergent opinions. Thematic and regional concerns define almost all chapters.

Early histories of the Natives were mere stereotypes, using the Natives as illustrations to discuss the stages of development of European culture and argue that the Natives were on the verge of cultural, and probably biological, extinction with the spread of European civilisation. They denigrated the Natives as 'cruel', 'uncivilised' and as 'noble savages'. Such myths have been removed by ethno-historians (largely of Euro-American descent), who over the last 40 years have based their conclusions on not only written sources (which they recognised had certain limitations being prejudiced against the Natives) but also oral histories derived from Native views. The researches of these historians, which this volume embodies, has provided a new understanding of Native history. This 'New History' has transformed the Euro-American vision of the Natives. They are now seen as people who had played an important role in shaping North American society since 1492. Dispelling myths and providing a fresh and alternative understanding of the Natives, the recent scholarship has replaced the barrier between Native and non-Native history by a symbiotic relationship.

The volume has 15 chapters, carved richly through researches in archaeology, anthropology, history, linguistics and Native culture. The contributors to the volume are conscious of the limitations of the written sources and oral history. Chapters 1 and 2 provide a direction in ascertaining the value of the Native views, emphasising the Native historical experiences and weaving them into the broad American fabric, without which, it is argued, the 'fullness' of American experience would remain unwitnessed and unfulfilled. The chapters seek to dismantle the long-held association of Native history with frontier or western history and fur-trade history. They challenge the frontier thesis and revise the insights of Frederick Jackson Turner and Harold Innis. Consequently, western and fur-trade history, seen from a multi-cultural perspective, reflects some of the epistemological debates. The chapters are also critical of the retrograde views (particularly if they violate the standards of racial justice) of statesmen like Thomas

Jefferson and Andrew Jackson. What is exciting about these chapters is that they have turned American history 'upside down'. They do not eulogise the democrats—Jefferson and Jackson; instead they portray and criticise their democracy as racist and biased.

Chapters 3–5 depend heavily on archaeological data to explain the development of hunter-gatherer societies amongst the Natives in North America; the emergence of mixed economies based on farming combined with hunting and gathering and the culmination of these into stratified agricultural societies characterised by a chiefdom level of socio-political organisation particularly in eastern United States. In case these chapters are read as constituting the imposition of a unilinear evolutionary scheme, the editors are quick to add that they (chapters) merely reflect the historical order in which such societies initially appeared.

The volume rapidly moves across different themes. From Native farmers the discussion shifts to studying the impact of European diseases on indigenous culture in the sixteenth century (chapter 6) and transformation and changes in Native societies between 1600–1880s (chapters 7–11) particularly in those regions of North America which were extensively settled by men of European and African origin. Each of these chapters examine the strategies of the Native peoples ranging from alliance to conflict, to facilitate European settlement and cope with and benefit from the European presence. They also seek to study the demographic expansion of the Europeans and their growing economic competitiveness which made it difficult for the Native peoples to determine their destinies in isolation.

Yet another valuable feature of this volume is the suggestion that indigenous societies are enduring and sometimes flourishing and rarely disappear even under most adverse conditions. Chapter 12 represents a keen study of the major struggles of the Natives between 1880 and 1960 to sustain and defend their reserves and the cultures that they embodied. The Native leaders, consequently, could forge a new collective identity as Indians that complemented and empowered their older ethnic identities. Moreover, the period since 1960 to recent times has witnessed the Native people increasing in numbers and controlling their political, economic and cultural life with renewed vigour. Such developments, despite the continuing Native problems of poverty, unemployment and dependency especially in the northern regions, belie the once firmly held belief of Euro-Americans that Native people would either become biologically extinct or disappear into the North American melting pot.

The volume conveys a certain amount of optimism about Native life. It even volunteers the use of the term 'Native Renaissance' to highlight the recent progress of the descendants of the first Americans. However, it remains to be noted that there still are persistent external pressures with which the Native peoples must contend.

The volume, although a valuable addition to Native American history, does not cover every aspect of it and may disappoint some readers searching for particular facts. Nonetheless, its strength is still its comprehensive study of Native life, the detailed bibliographic essay at the end of each chapter and the opening of fresh vistas of research in ethnohistory.

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Manuscripts and book reviews should be submitted in duplicate to Dr. G. Balachandran, Associate Editor, *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi, Delhi: 110 007, India. Books for review should be sent to the same address. Articles should be typewritten, double-spaced, in the current journal style. An abbreviated style-sheet appears on the inner back cover of this journal. A detailed style-sheet may be obtained on request.

***Sikka* and the crown: Genesis of the Native Coinage Act, 1876**

Sanjay Garg

The falling fortunes of the Mughal empire during the eighteenth century gave rise to a number of Indian powers that laid their claim for sovereignty. In the general scramble for independence, *Sikka* or the right to coinage, the unmistakable insignia of sovereignty, became the right most cherished by these claimants. Also, during the same period, a number of European trading companies, which were present on the Indian soil for quite some time, started assuming political character. Thus, the political ascendancy of various Indian as well as European powers during the eighteenth century was almost simultaneous. As a consequence, in matters concerning coinage and currency their interests in direct clash with each other.

John Deyell and Robert Frykenberg have discussed the question of minting prerogatives of the Indian ruling princes as an expression of *de jure* sovereignty and have described the efforts of the English East India Company to control Indian rulers' right to coinage in the light of Company's assumption of ritual overlordship of the continent.¹

This article carries the discussion into the post-1858 period and studies the political as well as economic dimensions of the relationship of the Crown's representative Government of India with the native rulers.² Various attempts made by the Government of India to curb the minting prerogatives of the Indian princely states until the passing of the Native Coinage Act, 1876, have been discussed in chronological detail to analyse the role of currency in the process of economic colonisation of India.

¹ John S. Deyell and Robert E. Frykenberg, 'Sovereignty and the "Sikka" under the Raj. Minting Prerogative and Imperial Legitimacy in India', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 19(1), January-March 1982, pp. 1-25.

² For a general background, see Ajit K. Neogy, *The Paramount Power and the Princely States of India, 1858-1882*, Calcutta, 1979.

I

With the passing over of the administration of the East India Company's possession in India to the British Crown in 1858, the concept of sovereignty of a large number of independent rulers moved to a different plane. Under the new arrangement, the entire country was divided into 'two Indias', viz., the 'British India', under the direct authority of the Central Indian Executive and Legislature and indirectly under that of the British Cabinet and the Parliament; and the India of the native states, which were neither a British 'possession', nor were its inhabitants British 'subjects'.³ These were the British protected states, bound with it in political, commercial and military ties under various treaties, engagements and *sanads*. Lee Warner has defined a native state in the following words:

A Native State is a political community, occupying a territory in India of defined boundaries, and subject to a common and responsible ruler who has actually enjoyed and exercised, as belonging to him in his own right duly recognised by the supreme authority of the British Government, any of the functions and attributes of internal sovereignty.⁴

The right to coinage was one such 'attribute of internal sovereignty' that had vexed the British since the earliest days of the East India Company. After the transfer of administration of India to the British Crown in 1858, the ritual of sovereignty moved on to a new dimension. As Deyell and Frykenberg point out,

The stature of the rajas, previously perceived as a thorn in the Company's hide, now made them jewels in the Empress's Crown. The confirmation and cultivation of the dignity of the Indian princes became an Imperial concern from this time onwards.⁵

This point is well-reflected in the British government's handling of the question relating to the changes in the inscriptions on native state coins immediately after the establishment of the authority of the Crown. Ordinarily, the name of only a paramount power is inscribed by a subordinate state on its coins. After deposition of the last Mughal ruler Bahadur Shah II in 1858, the British became the supreme power in India. Under the changed circumstances, many native states offered to replace the name of the Mughal emperor on their coins, with that of the Queen. The Government of India, however, regarded this as 'a matter of no great importance' and decided that it would not be advisable at that time to adopt 'any measures

³ Sidney Low, *The Indian States and Ruling Princes*, London, 1929, p. 8.

⁴ W Lee Warner, *The Native States of India*, 2nd edn, London, 1910, p. 31, originally published as *The Protected Princes of India*, London, 1894.

⁵ Deyell and Frykenberg, 'Sovereignty and the "Sikka"', p. 21.

of a general kind' to secure that objective. Since the government did not want to risk the alienation of big and powerful native rulers, who might have considered any effort to replace the name of the Mughal emperor with that of the Queen as an attempt to interfere with their sovereign prerogatives, it decided to leave the subject alone and, if at all, use great care and caution in this matter.⁶

II

While change in the superinscription on the coins of the native states was regarded as 'a matter of no great importance' by the Government of India, it was, at the same time, well aware of the economic role of the coinage as a currency. The British had realised the advantages of having a uniform currency for facilitating trade and administration. Thus, after successful assimilation of the several coinages of the East India Company's three presidencies—Bengal, Madras and Bombay—into one uniform currency in 1835, the great disadvantages suffered by the subjects of the native states in regard to money matters received attention.

Indian native states numbered no less than 562 and covered a total area of 712,508 square miles. These states included Hyderabad (as large as Italy) with a population of 14 million and an annual revenue of Rupees 8.5 crore and tiny states like Bilbari with a population of 27 persons and an annual income of Rupees 80 only. It has been estimated that 202 states had an area of less than 10 sq. miles and 139 less than 5 sq. miles, while 70 states had land area not exceeding 1 sq. mile.⁷

According to P.L. Gupta, '... more than a hundred native states existed through the country which claimed the right of striking their own money, when the English Crown assumed the power in 1858 A.D.'. 'The claim of these native rulers to the right to coinage resulted in the mushrooming of a large number of native mints throughout India. These mints often operated without observing strict control as was followed in the mints of the British government. As a result, large quantities of debased, and at times badly struck and rudely fashioned, coins of different weights and differing values came into circulation. Since there was no provision in these states to recall the defective or light-weight coins, the coins—accumulated for over a century—circulated in the market. The worsening of the situation was accelerated due to the role played by the *shroffs* or the money-changers. They charged varying rates of discount (*batta*) on different specie of coins in the market which resulted in a continually fluctuating exchange rate between British and native currencies. Another factor which directly affected the British coinage was that in many states, the mints indulged in the practice of melting down British coins to provide bullion for their own adulterated issues. Thus, to remove the evils of the

⁶ For a detailed discussion, see Sanjit Singh Randhawa, 'Change of Superscription on Coins of Native States, 1858–1872', *Journal of Indian History*, Vol. 14(2), August 1967, pp. 541–51.

⁷ The number and figures are based on the *Report of the Indian States Committee, 1928–29*, presided over by Sir Harcourt Butler.

⁸ P.L. Gupta, *Coins*, New Delhi, 1969, p. 169.

native currency, the Government of India was keen to introduce a uniform currency in these states.

Even before the assumption of paramountcy by the Crown, the Governor-General Lord Hardinge had noted (in 1845) that the abolition of native mints was 'the most effectual mode of introducing uniform currency'.⁹ The Court of Directors of the East India Company too, in the dispatch dated 21 October 1846, had endorsed the stand taken by the Indian government by emphasising the necessity of 'diminishing (when it can justly be effected) rather than increasing the number of native mints'.¹⁰ However, the intelligence reports received from the British political agents and residents at various native courts, showed the importance attached by the various native rulers to the right of coinage and the difficulties in decreasing the number of native mints. Though no attempts were immediately made by the Government of India to attain that objective, it instructed its political officers that 'in all future negotiations with native states possessing mints, it may be borne in mind that abolition of these mints is to be held as an object of paramount political importance'.

The suppression of native mints was comparatively easier in the territories that came directly under British administration through annexation or cession. Thus, a number of mints were closed in the annexed territories of Punjab, Nagpur and Awadh. Besides, the British authoritatively shut down many mints belonging to petty chiefs and minor states in Central India. Similarly, the mint of Sawantwadi was abolished in 1845. It is quite likely that the British would have gone ahead with their calculated move to authoritatively abolish the native mints but for the outbreak of the Great Rebellion of 1857.

After the dust of 1857 settled down, the question of having a uniform currency for India resurfaced. In 1859, Sir Charles Wood, the Secretary of State for India, exhorted the Indian government 'to obtain as far as that object is attainable, a currency of uniform value throughout India and the withdrawal from circulation many spurious and debased coinages which now exist'.¹¹ However, the Indian government again chose to tread very cautiously, as would be clear from the contents of a resolution passed in the Financial department in October 1859. It held that, '... this is not the time to press any restrictive measures on the native states'. It was, therefore, decided that the government should not 'interfere with the existing arrangements, whatever they may be'.¹² The general policy of the government regarding operation of mints in native states was also laid down in the following words: 'If the mints have in any case already been suppressed under orders of

⁹ National Archives of India (hereafter NAI), Financial Department, Original Consultations (hereafter OCs), dated 19 April 1845, No. 687

¹⁰ NAI, Foreign Department, Political Branch, Letters from Court, dated 21 October 1846, No. 28.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Despatch from Secretary of State, dated 15 September 1859, No. 39, Para 13

¹² 'Blue Book relating to the Suppression of Mints in Native States', pp. 80-81, quoted in an Office Note dated 21 June 1870. See NAI, Foreign Department, Finance Branch, 'A' Proceedings, November 1870, No. 2

Government, the President-in-Council would not re-open them; if they have not been suppressed, he would not now suppress them.¹³

While the Government of India refrained from any authoritative intervention in the right to coinage enjoyed by big native states, it was keen to terminate the same with regard to feudatory chiefs, a large number of whom had enjoyed this privilege. An opportunity came, in 1868, to abolish the minting prerogatives of the Raja of Khetri in Rajputana and to lay down a general policy regarding the coinage by the feudatory chiefs. It was noticed that the Raja's mint at Chirawa, which he had leased out to the contractors to strike 'the "charshaie" or Jeypore coin', was engaged in manufacturing counterfeit coins.¹⁴ After the usual deliberations, the policy of the Government of India with regard to the coining rights of the native states was redefined with the following provisions:

1. that mints must be established and worked on at the capitals of those rulers who have a right to exercise this attribute of sovereign power;
2. that they must be worked under their control and supervision;
3. that mints in the territories of subordinate and feudatory Chiefs and Nobles should henceforth be abolished; and
4. that compensation should be given by their suzerains to those *thakoors* and others who have long usurped or exercised the power of coining, and whose revenues would else be impaired.¹⁵

Besides, it was also resolved that each native state should manufacture merely its own coins, and in no case the coins of other states or of extinct dynasties.¹⁶

In 1869, the government collected samples of gold and silver coins issued by various native states and sent them to the Calcutta mint for assay with the view to determining the correct intrinsic values. Dr. J.F. Shekleton, Assay Master carried out assay of these coins and submitted a set of assay-tables to the Financial department. While perusing these tables, the Financial department recorded that 'Considerable inconvenience is experienced in the monetary transactions of the British government in the jurisdiction of native chiefs in consequence of the existence of native coinage differing in value from its own.'¹⁷

¹³ *Ibid*

¹⁴ NAL, Foreign Department, Finance Branch, 'A' Proceedings, October 1868, No. 17. Letter from Major W.H. Benyon, Political Agent at Jaipur to Lt Col R.H. Keatinge, Agent to the Governor-General in Rajputana, dated 5 August 1868, No. 127-91G, Para 4; for a detailed discussion on manufacture of counterfeit coins in the territories of the Raja of Khetri, see also, Neogy, *The Paramount Power*, pp. 210-13

¹⁵ NAL, Foreign Department, Finance Branch, 'A' Proceedings, October 1868, No. 20. Letter from W.S. Seton-Karr, Secretary to the Government of India with the Governor-General, Foreign Department, dated 3 October 1868, No. 358

¹⁶ *Ibid*, November 1868, No. 1. Office Memo No. 3360, dated 30 October 1868, signed by E.H. Lushington, Secretary to the Government of India with the Governor-General, Financial Department

¹⁷ Financial Department, Mint and Currency Branch, 'A' Proceedings, June 1869, No. 34. 'Observations' by the Government of India, Financial Department, No. 1,439, dated 24 June 1869.

The Financial department, therefore, asked the Foreign department to prepare a comprehensive statement 'of the mints now existing in the territories of our native chiefs, and of the title, character, amount and value of the coinage of each, with some account of the condition under which the coin is manufactured and charges made for the conversion of bullion into coin'.¹⁸

The Foreign department was further requested to consider 'whether any measure could be adopted to induce several native chiefs, or any of them to forego the privilege of issuing coins and to close their mint, or, if that appears impossible, to assimilate the coin of the mint in every respect, except device, to that of the Government of India as legal currency in their territories, on the condition that the coin of their mint be in like manner allowed currency as legal tender in British territories'.¹⁹

As can be gleaned from the above extracts, as part of the general policy to introduce a uniform currency throughout India, the government was keen to restrict the privilege of issuing coins within the narrowest possible limits by 'inducing' the native states to 'forego the privilege of issuing coins and close their mint'. But as the British were quite aware of the difficulties in adopting this measure, they now proposed to assimilate the native coinage into the currency system of British India. Under this proposal, the circulation of the coin of the government of India was to be extended into the territories of native states, and at the same time coins of these native states were to be declared as 'legal tender' in British India. However, as the assay of the native coins had revealed their debasement pattern, the government observed that:

It would be a needful condition of such an arrangement that the management of these foreign (Native) mints be subject to such conditions as might be imposed by the Government of India, with a view of ensuring the standard, purity and weight of the coins.²⁰

Acting upon the request of the Financial department, the Foreign department (on 20 July 1869) sent a circular to local governments and administrations to send their reports on the working of mints in the native states under their jurisdiction.²¹ The points of reference prescribed for inclusion in these reports were:

1. Political conditions of the state.
2. The nature, title and character of the coinage.
3. The annual outturn of the establishment, and the value of the coinage as compared with that of the British government.
4. The process of manufacture and any particulars as to the artificers employed.

¹⁸ *Ibid*

¹⁹ *Ibid*

²⁰ *Ibid*

²¹ NAI, Foreign Department, Finance Branch, 'A' Proceedings, July 1869, No. 2. Circular Letter No. 281, dated 20 July 1869

5. The arrangements for receiving bullion, and the charges (if any) levied for its conversion into coins.
6. General area of currency.²²

The reports, submitted to the government, contained very interesting information regarding minting activities in the Indian native states *circa* 1869–70.²³ A perusal of these reports reveals that during 1869–70, there were 59 mints in 42 princely states, mostly located in Rajputana, followed by Central India, Gujarat, and the Punjab.²⁴ In most cases, there was only one mint per princely state, though there were also some bigger states viz., Gwalior, Mewar (Jodhpur) and Marwar (Udaipur), as well as others like Alwar and Jhalawar, which had more than one active mint. The Maharawal of Dungarpur, although he did not have any mint in operation, asserted the right of coining silver and copper coins. As for the mints in the other parts of India, it was noticed that the mint establishment was on a skeletal use in most of the native states who possessed them. These mints were operated occasionally to strike a few pieces to mark the accession or anniversary of a ruler. It was observed on the basis of information compiled in 1869–70 that, 'In the Mahee Kanta, Surat, the Panch Mahals, Candish (Khandesh), Sattara and Dharwar, there are no mints. That of Sawant Warree was abolished in 1845. The Chiefs of Kolhapoor and Southern Mahratta Country have abandoned the coining In Sind the British Coinage alone is found The present chief of Rewah does not keep up the mint. In Duttia . . . no coin has been manufactured since the mutiny. The mint of Oorcha has been at work since that date, but is not at present made use of Punnah and Chutterpore . . . formerly had mints.'²⁵

Regarding the proposed measure to abolish or assimilate, the reports held discordant views. The Resident at Hyderabad was apprehensive about failure of any restrictive measure on the part of the government. He wrote:

The prerogative of coining is one on which the independent native governments set so much value that I feel confident that any measures which might be taken on the part of our government to interpose any restrictions on its exercise, or in any way to regulate the action of the local mints would be viewed with considerable mistrust and alarm.²⁶

Col. H.D. Daly, Officiating Agent of the Governor-General in Central India, on the other hand, held that the assimilation of the coins of mints in native states, leaving the device as the distinguishing symbol, would be practical. He was also convinced that 'with railways, communications, the inconvenience and loss which

²² *Ibid*

²³ *Ibid*, November 1870, Nos 3–24

²⁴ *Ibid*

²⁵ *Ibid*, No 2: Office Note dated 21 June 1870

²⁶ *Ibid*, No 4: Report by C B Saunders, Resident at Hyderabad, No 82, dated 6 September 1869.

people will sustain in having to deal with coinage comparatively useless outside the district they inhabit will bring to light the benefits of a coinage which will be universally received without the intervention of a broker'. Daly emphasised on the cooperation of the big native states for a successful implementation on the scheme. He wrote:

... if the question of general uniform coinage is to be dealt effectually, the assent of the big states must be first sought. This accomplished, the rest will soon follow.²⁷

The reports were generally unanimous in recommending the retention of mints by large native states. Lt. Col. R.H. Keatinge, Agent of the Governor-General in Rajputana, recommended the continuation of Bundi and Kotah mints.²⁸ Lt. W.J. W. Muir, Officiating Political Agent at Harawti in Rajputana, recommended the retention of the mints of Shahabad and Sironj belonging respectively to Jhalawar and Tonk, as he felt that 'abolition of the mints might lead to the complications'. He further referred to the Shahapura mint as 'dying a natural death' and suggested that '... it be left to do so rather than the authority to coin be withdrawn'.²⁹ Col. J.C. Brooke, Political Agent at Marwar, who had earlier unsuccessfully negotiated with the Maharaja of Mewar to abolish the mint of his feudatory chief at Kuchawan, reported to the government—'I do not expect the Maharaja to yield readily, nor do I see how we can, with justice, press him to so heavy a sacrifice were he cannot possibly gain any advantage'.³⁰ Thus, to implement the policy of the government to introduce a uniform currency he opined, 'when a greater amount of British currency has been introduced into the country, the direction of all the principal native mints will be very much restricted'.³¹

Lt. Col. J.P. Nixon, Political Agent in Mewar, reported on the subject of the mints in the native states of Udaipur (Mewar), Pertabgarh, Dungarpur and Banswara, where these were regarded as 'an insignia of royalty'. He recommended the abolition of the feudatory chiefs' mints at Salumber and Bheendur.³² Keatinge, on the other hand, genuinely feared that, 'His Highness (the Maharana of Mewar) would find it difficult to enforce such a measure without assistance from the paramount power (i.e., the government of India)'.³³

In the light of the reports from the political authorities in the native states, the questions that came up for the consideration of the government of India were:

²⁷ *Ibid.*, No 13 Report by Col. H.D. Daly, No 7F-60, dated 23 March 1870

²⁸ *Ibid.*, No 17 Report by Lt. Col. R.H. Keatinge, No 29F, dated 18 April 1870

²⁹ *Ibid.*, No 18 Report by Lt. W.J. W. Muir, No 271-9F, dated 5 April 1870

³⁰ *Ibid.*, No 20 Report by Col. J.C. Brooke, No 32-3F, dated 28 March 1870

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, No 22: Report by Col. J.P. Nixon, No 16F, dated 25 February 1870

³³ *Ibid.*, No 21: Letter from R.H. Keatinge to C.U. Aitchison, Officiating Secretary to the Government of India with the Governor-General, Foreign Department, No 187F, dated 2 June 1870

1. Whether any measures could be adopted to induce the several native chiefs or any of them to forego the privilege of issuing coin and to close their mints.
2. Whether, if such measures could not be adopted, the coin of the native states could be assimilated in every respect, except the device, to that of the government of India.
3. Whether native chiefs could be persuaded to admit the coin of the government of India as legal currency in their territories on condition that their coins in the like manner were allowed currency as legal tender in British territories.³⁴

All the above questions were examined in detail so as to effect much needed currency reforms in the native states. It is, therefore, worthwhile to analyse the stand taken by the Government of India on each of the above questions.

The first conclusion was that the government should not venture to abolish the minting prerogatives of the sovereign states. 'The power of coining', records an Office Note, 'being one of the most valued prerogatives of sovereignty, I do not think that we have any right to compel a sovereign state to relinquish it. That any sovereign state would willingly surrender it is, to my mind utterly improbable'.³⁵ A similar policy of non-interference or of 'Wait and Watch' was suggested for the Treaty states as well. The Office Note further records:

In the case of Sunnud-holding states, which have for long exercised the privilege of coining without demur on our part, I think it would be better to let matters remain as they are ³⁶

It was, over the years, observed by the government that the natural tendency for a state is to reduce the number of its mints, or, in case where there is only one, to let it fall into disuse. Thus, 'in 1847, there were ten mints at work in Scindia's dominions. There are now only five. In early days there were several mints in Cashmere (Kashmir). Now there is only one Serohi and Doongarpore, cease to issue coin at all'.³⁷

The second alternative, if the first one failed, to assimilate the native coins to that of the Government of India in every respect except the device, was also considered but was found 'equally beyond attainment'. Several technical and practical difficulties were noticed in assimilating native coins and thus having a uniform coinage for the peninsula of India which would be 'the same in weight, composition and form, except as regards the device'. This measure was practicable in two ways, viz.,

1. by issuing to such native states, as might be declared to have the right of coining, for the impression of the device, blanks of silver and copper, identical with those on which our own device is impressed, or

³⁴ *Ibid.*, No. 2. Office Note, dated 21 June 1870.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

2. by setting up at each capital of the native state machinery capable of turning out such blanks.³⁸

It was nevertheless feared that if the government were to supply blanks on which they had nothing else to do but stamp a device, the native chiefs would not consider that they were exercising in its entirety the right of coining.³⁹ They might have also looked upon it as a advance step to some future infringement of their dignities. Besides, the loss of seigniorage by the native states, and the cost of carriage of blanks from the government mints to the native states were also considered to be detrimental factors. The second proposal too would have involved enormous expenditure, for which the native states were to get no return.

The third question before the government depended on the decision upon the second proposal, as the extension of the coin of the Government of India as legal currency in the native states was subject to the condition that the coin of the native states would be allowed as legal tender in British Indian territory. But from the second proposal it was clear that the government was not prepared to admit the coinage of the native states as a legal tender in British territory, unless it was assimilated to its own coinage in all substantial respects.

C.U. Aitchison, Officiating Secretary to the Government of India in the Foreign department, summarised the economic and political benefits as well as difficulties in adopting a uniform coinage in his Note dated 8 September 1870, submitted to the Governor-General Lord Mayo. He enumerated the benefits in the following words:

There is nothing that would conduce to material prosperity of India and facilitate the interchange of the products of her various provinces more than a uniform coinage. It would expand the intelligence of the people, increase their trade, strengthen their mutual sympathies, relieve them from the losses arising from the fluctuations of exchange. It would also have a very important political effect, and in times of disturbance would give the British government a great hold upon native states in proportion to the amount of their coins that it might have in reserve in its treasuries.⁴⁰

At the same time, the difficulties in the way of introducing any such scheme were enormous and indeed overwhelming. Aitchison records:

There are difficulties in recalling the current native coins and substituting a new coinage even if the mints could be suppressed. There are difficulties in the conversion of accounts, in the adjustment of fixed contract, of mortgages, rents, incomes, pay of troops &c., which are almost insuperable, and which could not

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, No 3. Office Note by C U Aitchison.

be effected without influencing the mass of the people, in all the petty transactions of daily life and, perhaps, creating an amount of discontent and disaffection which the British government might be ill-prepared to meet.⁴¹

Thus, discussing the pros and cons of the proposed measures the Note of the Secretary, Foreign department, laid down cardinal principles for conducting the government's policy with regard to the suppression and regulation of the native mints and assimilation of native coinage, viz.,

1. Where mints have either been suppressed altogether, or have not been in active use within the last five years, their revival or opening should not be permitted.
2. All outlying states, such as Cashmere &c., and all purely local coinage which confined to a definite beat and does not come into play in general mercantile transactions, should be left absolutely alone. The only parts of India where an attempt to influence native chiefs in the matter should be made for the present is Central India and Rajputana. If any scheme succeeds there, it will not be difficult to adopt it elsewhere.⁴²

Aitchison also felt that if any native state expresses a determination not to give up their mints, the government should help it, as far as possible, to procure good machinery and to improve their assay and process of coining. He suggested that

The agents in Central India and Rajpootana might be instructed not to make any written communication to the chiefs on the subject, but to take such opportunities as may occur, of discussing the matter individually with them in conversation and of explaining to them:

- (a) the capabilities of the mints at Calcutta and Bombay which are able to turn out coins sufficient for the requirements of the whole of India;
- (b) that if any chief will assimilate his coins in standard, purity and weight to those of the British government, and gave sufficient guarantee that this will be done, government will be prepared to consider how far the coins of that state can be made a legal tender in British India;
- (c) that the device and inscription of the coin will be such as the native government might choose;
- (d) that the government is willing either to supply the blanks to be stamped by themselves, or to *issue the coin from the government mints stamped with the native device.*⁴³

Now this proposal of the Government of India to undertake the manufacture of coins of the native states was mooted and for this purpose the Secretary offered to

⁴¹ *Ibid*

⁴² *Ibid*.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, italics mine.

consider the propriety of establishing a new mint at some convenient place, like Neemuch or Agra, 'should any number of chiefs indicate a readiness to adopt an international coinage'.⁴⁴

Mayo agreed with the Secretary not to take any particular action in the matter, for the time being, beyond instructing the political agents, 'to point out to the native chiefs, as opportunity arises how advantageous it would be for them to take steps to make Indian coinage more uniform and to assimilate it as far as possible to that of the paramount power'.⁴⁵ He also instructed them to discourage altogether, or, if possible, prevent establishment of new mints.

The entire matter was then placed before the Governor-General's Council and a Confidential Resolution was passed on 6 October 1870. It recorded:

... however desirable and beneficial a uniform coinage for all-India may be, it is not possible to introduce a scheme for this purpose; unless the mints in native states were closed or their management be taken under the control of the government of India.

The objections to such a course, both on political and general grounds, are so great that His Excellency deems it inexpedient to take any action in the matter at present beyond instructing political agents to point out to the native chiefs, as the opportunity arises, how advantageous it would be for them to cooperate in making the Indian Coinage more uniform, and in assimilating it, as far as possible to that of the British government.⁴⁶

As far as the principal native states who were not expected to willingly surrender the right of coining were concerned, 'the government was not prepared to sanction any authoritative interference'.⁴⁷ However, on the other hand, it sanctioned the closing of the mint at Shahpura in Rajputana, as it regarded that 'the political position of the state is not much as to entitle it to the privilege of coining'.⁴⁸ Likewise, the political agent at Rewah Kanta was asked to explain the circumstances under which mints at four states in the Bombay Presidency, viz., Barrea, Chhota Udaipur, Lunawara and Soanth were opened, and to report whether they can now be abolished.⁴⁹

The proceedings of the Government of India in this matter along with the copies of the correspondence with the political officers, were forwarded to the Secretary of State on 16 November 1870.⁵⁰ In his reply dated 16 February 1871, the Secretary

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, Office Note by Mayo, dated 14 September 1870

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, No 25 Foreign Department Resolution (Confidential), No. 402F, dated 6 October 1870, Para 1

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, Para 2

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Para 5

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Para 4

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, No 26 Despatch to Secretary of State, No 4, dated 16 November 1870

of State agreed with the measures adopted by the Government of India in its resolution and hoped that few chiefs who possessed the privilege of minting would be likely to resign it at their own free will.⁵¹

In June 1871 the government decided to make the facilities of the government mints at Bombay and Calcutta available to the native states for coinage of copper. The conditions were that

... if the copper is supplied by the native state, the mint shall coin it at a charge of four annas for one hundred pieces, but that if the mint has to find the copper, then the market value of the metal is to be added to the above charge.⁵²

However, there were few takers of the above proposal. One of the native states who showed some inclination on the subject was Patiala. Before taking any decision the Maharaja of Patiala sought information on the following points:

1. Whether such coins (copper) would bear the inscription of the *riyaset* or of the British government.
2. Whether such coins would be current in British territory.
3. Whether the mint officers would require any special order before receiving, or have been directed generally to receive, copper sent for coining by a native state.⁵³

This inquiry from the Maharaja of Patiala led to a reconsideration of the entire policy of the government. It was then resolved that coin struck for native states may bear any device approved by the Foreign department and that the mint master should execute any orders for copper coin that may be sent to him by the native states. However, regarding the currency of such coins in the British territories, the spirit of the 1870 resolution was echoed in the following words:

... the coin struck for the Patiala state cannot pass as legal tender in the British territories without a change of the law ⁵⁴

As the Governor-General Lord Mayo had been assassinated at Port Blair on 8 February 1872 and his successor was yet to assume office, the government declared that it was 'not prepared at present' to promote any change in the law for admitting coins of a native state as a legal tender in the British Indian territories.⁵⁵

⁵¹ NAI, Foreign Department, Political Branch, Despatch from Secretary of State, No 24, dated 16 February 1871

⁵² NAI, Financial Department, Mint and Currency Branch, 'A' Proceedings, June 1871, No. 14. Financial Department Resolution, No. 1,643, dated 30 June 1871. Later, the coining charges were fixed at 1 rupee per 1,000 coins, see Financial Department, General Branch, 'A' Proceedings, August 1871, No. 51

⁵³ *Ibid.*, May 1872, No. 10. Financial Department Resolution, No. 2,646, dated 13 April 1872

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

III

Lord Northbrook, who succeeded Lord Mayo on 3 May 1872, was very keen to adopt a general policy regarding the handling of native coinage with a view to introduce a uniform coinage throughout India. At his instance, the question of change in the existing law to facilitate the currency of the native coinage in British India was revived in the Financial department in July 1872. R.B. Chapman, Secretary to the Government of India in the Financial department was doubtful about the working of such a system. He observed in his Office Note that, 'if at all it worked . . . I do not expect it would do in this generation'.⁵⁶ Lord Northbrook, on the other hand, did not see any objection and regarded the plan to admit the coins of the native states as a legal tender in the British Indian territories as 'a beginning in the direction of an uniform coinage'.⁵⁷

Thus, in September 1872, a resolution prescribing the condition on which coins of a native state may be admitted as a legal tender in British India, was introduced in the Financial department.⁵⁸ The provision of the resolutions were to apply on a reciprocal basis to the silver and copper coins 'struck by, or on behalf of' any native state 'which has a mint in active operation, or which may hereafter be held entitled to re-open such a mint'.⁵⁹ As a necessary condition of this arrangement, the native states were to agree to abstain from coining in the same metal in their own mint. As an alternative, the government of India agreed to manufacture the native coins in a British mint under the same regulation as well as purity standards as applicable to its own coins. As a distinctive feature, however, such coinage was to bear the obverse and reverse device approved by the Governor-General-in-Council as well as value in the money of the Government of India in English language. Besides, the Government of India kept to itself the power to regulate the quantum of coinage for any native state.

The government was keen to adopt a legislation for this purpose, 'as soon as information is received that any native state is ready to enter into the reciprocal arrangement described in the resolution'.⁶⁰ As the consent of the Secretary of State was required to adopt a law to authorise the Government of India to declare coins of native states to be a legal tender in British India, a copy of the above resolution was sent to him on 13 October 1872.⁶¹ The Secretary of State, in his reply dated 12 February 1873, sanctioned generally the arrangements proposed by the Government of India, but with regard to the condition which required the native states to undertake to abstain from minting coins in the same metal at their own mints, he

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, October 1872, Nos 1-2 (K W) Office Note by R.B. Chapman, dated 11 July 1872.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Office Note by Lord Northbrooke, dated 15 July 1872.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, No. 2 Financial Department, Despatch to Secretary of State, No. 398, dated 13 October 1872

wanted to have some safeguards against the possibility of British Indian territories being flooded with the inferior coins manufactured in native mints. He therefore suggested that a provision be made that 'in the event of subsequent manufacture of the coin by any native chief, the coin of the same metal . . . should cease to be legal tender in British Indian territories'.⁶² The Secretary of State also stressed upon the importance of 'proceeding with great caution in regard to the introduction of the measures contemplated, and especially as to the exercise of any pressure upon the chiefs with the view to obtain their cooperation'.⁶³ He held the opinion that the 'object aimed at can only be obtained gradually, and with the goodwill and free consent of native rulers'.⁶⁴ The Secretary of State directed the Government of India to forward the draft of the proposed legislation and warned that it may not be passed into law without his prior approval.

It was not long after that the government was provided with an opportunity to move ahead in the direction of the proposed legislation. On 19 March 1873, Capt. T. Cadell, Political Agent at Alwar, informed Col. J.C. Brooke, the Officiating Agent of the Governor-General in Rajputana, about the willingness of that state to agree to the terms proposed in the resolution.⁶⁵ 'The coinage arrangements are beginning to bear fruits', recorded a jubilant Aitchison in his Office Note dated 24 April 1873.⁶⁶ The Financial department asked the Legislative department to prepare a bill 'for the purpose of admitting the coins of native states to be a legal tender on payment or in account in British India', and also directed that 'the provisions of the bill should be general and not special to any state'.⁶⁷ The draft of the bill was accordingly prepared in the Legislative department under the supervision of Sir Richard Temple, Member of the Supreme Council of the Government of India Incharge of the Financial department.⁶⁸ The draft of the bill entitled 'A Bill to Enable the Government of India to Declare Certain Coins of the Native States to be a Legal Tender in British India', was sent to the Secretary of State on 15 September 1873 for his approval.⁶⁹

Meanwhile, reports from the political officers at various native courts were received by the Government of India.⁷⁰ It was noticed that with the exception of

⁶² *Ibid*, March 1873, No 3 Financial Department, Despatch from Secretary of State, No 47, dated 12 February 1873.

⁶³ *Ibid*

⁶⁴ *Ibid*

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, May 1873, No. 8 (encl.): Letter from Captain T. Cadell, No. 135, dated 19 March 1873. During the minority of Maharao Raja Mangal Singh of Alwar, the State was governed by a Regency Council headed by the Political Agent.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, Nos 8-9 (K W)

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, No. 9

⁶⁸ 60 copies of the draft Bill were published by the Government Central Press, Simla, on 22 August 1873. See, NAI, Foreign Department, Finance Branch, 'A' Proceedings, April 1876, No 8-15 (K W)

⁶⁹ NAI, Financial Department, Despatch to Secretary of State, No 399, dated 15 September 1873

⁷⁰ (i) Report by Officiating Secretary to the Chief Commissioner Mysore, No. 6,897-196F, dated 5 March 1873.

Alwar, the states in Rajputana and Central India were not in favour of the government's scheme. Similarly, neither Cochin nor Travancore were willing to enter into the proposed arrangement.⁷¹ All these states were averse to giving up their minting rights because they regarded coining as one of the insignia of independence and were opposed to lose an important source of revenue. Besides, the cost of carriage of bullion to the mint and the coin therefrom was also seen as a crunch on their incomes.

Presumptions and apprehensions differed on the feasibility of the legislation. 'I did not expect any other result', commented R.B. Chapman on the response of the native chiefs.⁷² He suggested dropping of the entire matter, at least for the time being. Sir Richard Temple did not see that the Bill could do any harm.⁷³ Aitchison was even more hopeful than Temple. He noted, 'As Ulwar has agreed, I think it would be as well to go on with it [the Bill]; although the agreement of any one state is no very great matter, others *may* follow in time.'⁷⁴

The Secretary of State, who was appraised about the response of other native states,⁷⁵ was himself sceptical about the success of the proposed legislation. In his reply dated 7 January 1874 he declined to make any further observations on the subject for the time being.⁷⁶

(ii) Report by Col Lewis Pelly, Officiating Agent of the Governor-General in Rajputana, No 51F, dated 18 September 1873

(iii) Report by Col. A R E. Hutchinson, Officiating Political Agent, Mewar, No. 61A 1F, dated 23 April 1873

(iv) Report by Major C K M. Walter, Officiating Political Agent, Marwar and Jaisalmer, No 39-1F, dated 17 March 1873

(v) Report by Lt Col W.H. Beynon, Political Agent, Jaipur, No 93-70G, dated 28 April 1873

(vi) Report by Capt A W. Roberts, Officiating Political Agent, Eastern States, Rajputana, No 445, dated 23 August 1873

(vii) Report by Capt T Cadell, Political Agent, Alwar, No 135, dated 19 March 1873

(viii) Report by Capt J C Berkeley, Political Agent, Harawti and Tonk, No 514-7F, dated 10 September 1873.

(ix) Report by Lt Col W. Carnell, Political Superintendent, Sirohi, No 131-11F, dated 23 April 1873

(x & xi) Reports by Capt C W. Burton, Asst Agent, Sujangarh, No 106, dated 19 March 1873

(xii) Report by Col J. Watson, Agent to the Governor-General in Central India, No 17F-282, dated 25 September 1873

For all the above Reports see, NAI, Foreign Department, Finance Branch, 'A' Proceedings, October 1873, Nos 1-12

⁷¹ NAI, Financial Department, Mint and Currency Branch, 'B' Proceedings, August 1874, No 6 Contents of Part 'B'

⁷² *Ibid.*, 'A' Proceedings, July 1874, Nos 6-13 (K W) Office Note by R B Chapman, dated 16 October 1874

⁷³ *Ibid.*, Office Note by Richard Temple, dated 17 October 1874

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, Office Note by C U Aitchison, n d

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, No. 9, Financial Department, Despatch to Secretary of State, No. 526, dated 28 November 1873

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, No 10, Financial Department, Despatch from Secretary of State, No 12, dated 7 January 1874

The Government of India, on the other hand, was not ready to let this opportunity escape. In a letter dated 13 March 1874, it again pleaded with the Secretary of State that

although no native state except Ulwar, is at present willing to enter into the arrangements which we have prescribed for that purpose, yet it is possible that they may in time be inclined to accept our terms as the Ulwar state has done.⁷⁷

The government was anxious to be in a position to accept at once any proposal to that end which any native state might make and for this purpose legal powers were required. Looking at the desperation of the government to adopt a legislation to regulate the native coinage, the Secretary of State reluctantly yielded to its request. His sanction was conveyed by a letter dated 14 May 1874:

As you consider it desirable to obtain legal power with reference to the possibility of other native states agreeing to the contemplated arrangements hereafter, I will not withhold my consent to the course which you propose to adopt.⁷⁸

Immediately, the Legislative department was requested to proceed with the draft Bill.⁷⁹ As preparations were made to introduce the Bill in the Legislative Council, a new development took place.

In January 1875, a spontaneous offer was made on behalf of Maharaja Holkar of Indore, by his Minister Sir T. Madhava Rao. He submitted the draft agreement to General H.D. Daly, Agent to the Governor-General in Central India, which contained terms and conditions on which Maharaja Holkar was willing to 'close his mints and forego his privilege of coinage' by transferring his right to the Government of India for a period of 99 years.⁸⁰ However, Holkar wanted to keep to himself the right to terminate the agreement at any time by giving three years' previous notice.⁸¹

This offer, from one of the large native states, was welcomed by Daly who observed: 'I think Sindia may be moved after Holkar's arrangements are completed.'⁸² However, on certain technical points, expert opinions from Col. H. Hyde, Mint Master, Calcutta, and E.F. Harrison, Comptroller General of India, were sought. One of the points for consideration was that whether the government

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, No. 11, Financial Department, Despatch to Secretary of State, No. 79, dated 13 March 1874.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, No. 12, Financial Department, Despatch from Secretary of State, No. 258, dated 14 May 1874.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, No. 13, Order by the Government of India in Financial Department, No. 4,043, dated 26 June 1874.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, September 1875, Nos 1-2 (K W), Letter from Sir T. Madhava Rao to Gen. H.D. Daly, No. 101, dated 26 January 1875

⁸¹ *Ibid*

⁸² *Ibid*, Unofficial Letter from H.D. Daly to Baring (?), dated 3 February 1875

should agree to the provision of terminating the agreement by a three-year notice. While Chapman, a hardliner, as well as Sir William Muir, who had succeeded Sir Richard Temple as the Member of the Supreme Council of the Government of India Incharge of the Financial Department, and Col. Hyde were unanimous in their opinion that the right of coining must be given up by the native states forever, Northbrook, the Governor-General, followed a softer line. He held that, 'it would be sufficient that there should be a long notice and that the native states should engage not to use the same device'.⁸³ The question was 'not so much what is best as what can be effected', recorded the impatient Governor-General in Office Note dated 17 June 1875.⁸⁴

It was now stipulated that instead of *forever*, a period of 30 years may be provided for which the native states should abstain from coining. As this new provision was a departure from the contents of the draft Bill approved by the Secretary of State, the Government of India, on 9 August 1875, once again addressed itself to the Home government seeking sanction of the amendment thus proposed. The Despatch recorded:

Upon reconsidering this condition (of abstaining from coining forever) in the light of the present negotiation with the Maharaja Holkar, we think it so improbable that any native state would assent, that we are unwilling to risk the failure of the present negotiation by insisting upon it.⁸⁵

Since now one of the large native states had expressed its desire to enter into an agreement with the Government of India, it was perhaps not difficult for the Secretary of State to sanction the modification of the Bill. His sanction was conveyed in a despatch dated 30 November 1875⁸⁶ and was placed before the Governor-General's Council which met on 25 January 1876. The modification approved by the Secretary of State was thereafter sent to the Legislative department for amending the draft Bill.⁸⁷

IV

The stage was now set to have the much awaited legislation, and looking at the pace at which the subsequent events moved, it was clear that the Government of India was in a no mood to wait.

⁸³ *Ibid*, Office Note.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, No 1, Financial Department, Despatch to Secretary of State, No 270, dated 9 August 1875.

⁸⁶ NAI, Foreign Department, Finance Branch, 'A' Proceedings, April 1876, No 14, Financial Department, Despatch from Secretary of State No. 590, dated 30 November 1875

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, Order by the Government of India in Foreign Department, No 432, dated 25 January 1876.

On 8 February 1876, the amended Bill was introduced in the Governor-General's Legislative Council. While introducing the Bill, Sir William Muir detailed the objects as well as provisions enunciated therein, which would eventually 'smooth the way to the adoption of a common currency throughout all districts, both native and British'.⁸⁸ The long-cherished desire of the British government to suppress the native mints was also to be accomplished under the proposed legislation as 'every native state which gives in its adhesion to the project will close one of the springs from which the varied currency flow, and in so far diminish the mischief'.⁸⁹

In the subsequent meeting of the Legislative Council on 15 February, a discussion was held in which Maharaja Iswari Prasad Narayan Singh of Benaras and the Maharaja of Vizianagaram, both Members of the Governor-General's Legislative Council, participated. Northbrook, acting as the President clarified that, 'the Government of India, in introducing this Bill, desires in no way to exercise pressure, either directly or indirectly upon native states'.⁹⁰ It was thereafter decided to refer the Bill to a Select Committee with instructions to report in a month, and publish the Bill in the *Gazette of India* as well as in respective *Gazettes* of the local governments.⁹¹ On the same day, Sir William Muir, Sir Arthur Hobhouse (Member of the Supreme Council of the Government of India Incharge of the Legislative Department), Sir Edward Clive Bayley, J.R. Bullen Smith, the Maharaja of Benaras and the Maharaja of Vizianagaram were appointed as the members of the Select Committee.⁹² The Committee submitted its report on 9 March 1876.⁹³ On 14 March, the report was presented in the Legislative Council⁹⁴ and on the same day the second draft of the Bill was published. The revised Bill was presented and was passed in the Legislative Council on 28 March 1876.⁹⁵ On the same day, the Bill received the assent of the Governor-General and was adopted as Act IX of 1876—An Act to Enable the Government of India to Declare Certain Points of Native States to be Legal Tender in British India.

The Act provided that on a native state agreeing to abstain from coining for, at least 30 years, and not to allow coins resembling those of British India to be struck under its authority, the Government of India would strike for the state coins identical in weight and fineness with those of the British India, but with a device differing from that used before by the state. Such coins were to be declared legal tender in British India. (Full text of the Act in Appendix I).

⁸⁸ *Abstracts of the Proceedings of the Council of the Governor-General of India Assembled for the Purpose of Making Laws and Regulations, 1876*, Vol. XV, Calcutta, 1877, p. 26

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 27

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 30, 32

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁹³ The Report, published on 13 March 1876, does not bear the signatures of the Indian Members of the Select Committee, namely Maharajas of Vizianagaram and Benaras. See, NAI, Legislative Department, 'A' Proceedings, April 1876, No. 116-130

⁹⁴ *Abstracts of Proceedings*, p. 79.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 96

This attempt to unify the currency of India was not very successful. Up to 1893, only four minor states, namely Alwar, Bikaner, Dewas (senior and junior branches) and Dhar had availed themselves of the provisions of the Act. In 1893, government mints were closed to public coinage and thereafter only one state, namely Sailana, was allowed to get its coins struck under the provisions of this Act. With all the major native states abstaining to be an agreeing party, the Native Coinage Act became, in effect, 'a dead letter'.⁹⁶

Appendix

Act No. IX of 1876

Passed by the Governor-General of India in Council
(Received the Assent of the Governor-General on 28 March 1876)

An Act to Enable the Government of India to Declare Certain Coins of the Native States to be a Legal Tender in British India

Preamble	WHEREAS it is expedient to enable the Governor-General in Council to declare that a tender of payment of money in certain coins made for or issued by native states, shall be a legal tender in British India; It is hereby enacted as follows:
Short title	1. This Act may be called 'The Native Coinage Act, 1876': It extends to the whole of British India and it shall come into force at once.
Local extent	
Commencement	
Interpretation clause	2. In this Act, Native State means any state in India which is under the protection or political control of Her Majesty, or of which the government shall have acknowledged the supremacy of the British crown.
Power to declare that the coins of a native states shall be legal tender	3. Subject to the provisions of Section IV, the Governor-General in Council may, from time to time, by notification in the <i>Gazette of India</i> , declare that a tender of payment of money, if made in the coin, or coins of any specified metal, made under this Act for any native state, shall be a legal tender in British India; and the provisions of the Indian Coinage Act, 1870, shall apply to the coins to which such notification refers, so far as such provisions are applicable thereto, and save as expressly provided by such notification.

⁹⁶ F Pridmore, *The Coins of the British Commonwealth of Nations to the End of the Reign of George VI, 1952. Part 4 India, Volume 2-Uniform Coinage*, London, 1980, p. 63

When such
power may be
exercised

4. The power conferred by the first clause of Section III shall be exercisable only when the coins referred to in such notification comply with the following conditions [that is to say]
 - in the case of coins of gold, silver or bronze
 - (a) their fineness is identical with that for the time prescribed by law for coins of the Government of India of the same metal;
 - in the case of coins whether of gold, silver, bronze or copper
 - (b) they are identical in weight with some coins of the Government of India of the same metal, which may for the time being be legally coined at any Mint of the Government of India, or bear such relation thereto as is approved by the Governor-General in Council;
 - (c) the devices upon their obverse and reverse differ from devices on coins now made or issued by any native state, and have been approved by the Governor-General in Council;
 - (d) upon each of such coins its value in money of the Government of India is inscribed in English language;
 - (e) the state for which they are coined has undertaken to abstain during a term of not less than 30 years, from the date of the notification, from coining in its own mint gold, silver, bronze or copper, as the case may be, and has also undertaken that no coin resembling coins for the time being a legal tender in British India shall, after the expiration of the said term, be struck under his authority or its permission at any place within or without its jurisdiction;
 - (f) such state has formally declared that a tender of payment of money, if made in coins of the Government of India of the same metal shall, in the territories subject to such state, be a legal tender in the cases in which payment made in such coins would, under the law for the time being in force, be a legal tender in British India;
 - (g) such state has also agreed that the law and rules for the time being in force respecting the cutting and breaking of the coin of the Government of India reduced in weight by reasonable wearing or otherwise, or counterfeit, or called-in by proclamation,

- shall under this Act, and that it will defray the cost of cutting and breaking them; and
- (h) such state has also agreed not to issue the same coins below their nominal value, and not to allow any discount or other advantage to any person in order to bring them into circulation.
- Native states authorised to send metal to British India mints for coinage
5. It shall be lawful to any such state to send to any mint in British India metal to be made into coin under this Act; and, subject to the mint rules for the time being in force, and to the provisions hereinafter contained, the Mint-Master shall receive such metal and convert it into coin, provided it be fit for coinage.
- Nothing herein contained shall be deemed to entitle any such state to have coins made under this Act at any mint of the Government of India of any metal which is not for the time being legally coined at such mint.
- Power to impose a charge for coinage
6. The Governor-General in Council may impose on any metal sent to a mint for coinage under this Act, the duty (if any) leviable on the same metal under the Indian Coinage Act, 1870, and also a charge sufficient to defray the expenses of coinage over and above the expenses of assay and refining; and the Mint-Master shall coin such metal at the charges so imposed.
- Power to limit number of coins to be made under this Act for any native state
7. The Governor-General in Council may from time to time, with reference to the reasonable requirements of the population of any native state, fix the maximum number of any coins of any particular metal that shall be coined under this Act.
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Labour unsettled: Mobility and protest in the Madras region, 1750–1800

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Colonial depictions of socially immutable and spatially immobile village communities in medieval India have lost much of their credibility during the last decades.¹ Yet, recent indigenist interpretations of history seem to fall back on this intellectual inheritance to prove a cultural dichotomy between 'homeostatic' [sic!] but 'accountable' Indian communities that ostensibly ensured the subsistence of all and the dynamic but 'unaccountable', exploitative capitalist society of the colonial and post-colonial periods.² However urgent present desires may be to immobilise (and

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¹ See Romila Thapar, *Interpreting Early India*, Delhi, 1993, pp. 1–22. Critical comments on preconceptions of spatial immobility in precolonial India can be found in David Ludden, 'History Outside Civilisation and the Mobility of South Asia', *South Asia*, Vol. 17(1), 1994, pp. 1–23, see also David Washbrook, 'Progress and Problems: South Asian Economic and Social History c. 1720–1860', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 22(1), 1988, pp. 62–63, 67–68.

² For the northern Tamil region's precolonial society, 'homeostasis' is asserted by Chitra and S S Srivakumar, *Peasants and Nabobs: Agrarian Radicalism in Late Eighteenth Century Tamil Country*, Delhi, 1993, especially p. 83. These authors have developed their argument further in 'The Meaning of Social Order in the Tamil Country', in Peter Robb, ed., *Meanings of Agriculture: Essays in South Asian History and Economics*, Delhi, 1996, pp. 332–89, especially pp. 352, 367–71, 381–83. For the ideological context of such interpretations of history see Sarah Joseph, 'Politics of Contemporary Indian Communitarianism', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 32(40), 2–10 October 1997, pp. 2517–23.

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thereby harmonise) the pre-colonial past, they cannot be reconciled with historical evidence. This article presents source material from late eighteenth century Madras region and attempts to demonstrate that artisans (and even agricultural labourers) possessed a considerable degree of spatial and occupational mobility. The contradictions and fluidity of this period of transition to formal colonial rule, it is further argued, created a type of labour mobility that displayed equally contradictory, inconstant features. On the one hand, mobility often implied structural alterations in labour relations, reduced their duration, improved working people's bargaining position and favoured certain forms of social conflict. On the other, mobility could also involve subsistence risks for the lower classes, thereby restoring or reinforcing the employers' position. The first section of the article sketches the changing socio-economic and political contexts in which mobility became and remained possible. As this potentiality could acquire concrete historical forms only through appropriation by conflicting social groups, the second section deals with one specific aspect of this appropriation, namely with the impact of potential mobility on plebeian modes of protest.

Changing Contexts of Mobility

While the spatial mobility of mercantile groups, such as the famous 'itinerary merchant guilds' of South India,³ has been acknowledged long since, recent historiography has also highlighted the importance of migratory movements of agriculturists, especially from the fourteenth century onwards. Some of the new, Telugu-speaking settlers in the Tamil region were merchants and artisans, but most of them seem to have been armed peasants who opened less fertile tracts for cultivation.⁴ From about the sixteenth century, socio-economic processes, which have been termed 'commercialisation' or 'proto-capitalism', provided the context for a type of mobility that had spatial, social and occupational dimensions.⁵ The control of village resources (including land, labour and water) which had been collectively held by the community of *kaniyatchikkarars* (dominant peasants) of each agricultural settlement was rather subverted than dissolved by the ascendancy of new social relationships approximating private property. As Tsukasa Mizushima has shown, *nattars* (agrarian magnates) acquired possession of village shares in several agricultural settlements and thus developed supralocal interests and parti-

³ K A Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India From Prehistoric Times to the Fall of Vijayanagar*, Delhi, 1995 (1st edn 1955), pp 331–33, see also R. Champakalakshmi, *Trade, Ideology and Urbanization: South India 300 BC to AD 1300*, Delhi, 1996, pp 47–58, 86 (fn 107).

⁴ Cf David Ludden, *Peasant History in South India*, Delhi, 1989 (1st edn 1985), pp 42–52; Burton Stein, *Vijayanagara*, Cambridge, 1989, pp 45–47; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India 1500–1650*, Cambridge, 1990, pp 16–20.

⁵ C A Bayly, Frank Perlin and David Washbrook have studied these social processes for different regions and from different angles. I refrain from giving references to these authors' more familiar works; see also Frank Perlin, 'Money Use in Late Precolonial South Asia and the World Trade in Currency Media', in *idem*, *The Invisible City: Monetary, Administrative and Popular Infrastructures in Asia and Europe, 1500–1900*, Aldershot/Brookfield, 1993, pp 131–281.

cipated in a wide range of commercial transactions.⁶ The tendency of individualisation of land rights implied changes in the relations between dominant peasants and dominated agricultural labourers. In a slow process of differentiation (that was never to be completed), relations between individuals emerged from what had been relations between communities.⁷ Agricultural labourers had been bound to a certain agricultural settlement as a community—they had been collectively subordinated under a community of dominant peasants. At the same time, they had possessed a hereditary claim to a share of the village's produce and other rights to use village resources.⁸ Commercialisation involved a slow corrosion of these relationships. Accordingly, there is evidence for agrestic slavery in the sense that agricultural labourers could be sold or mortgaged without disposing of land at the same time. Yet, much more common seems to have been another mode of severing or at least weakening ties between land and labour: the creation of labour relations resembling (but not fully equating with) wage labour.⁹ It is not contended here that the village communities' corporate forms of social organisation broke down completely; nor does the present state of research allow any statement on the extent to which this tendency of differentiation materialised. However, for our present discussion, suffice it to note that under certain conditions even agricultural labourers could or had to leave their villages, break away from communities. As land rights and surplus of agricultural settlements could be transferred and redistributed more easily, shifts in the distribution of human resources were facilitated too. Thus, from the sixteenth century onwards, the agrarian population of the Tamil country responded to new economic opportunities created by investment in irrigation with intra-regional migration.¹⁰

⁶ An important study of these problems based on a scrutiny of eighteenth century sources is Tsukasa Mizushima, *Nattar and the Socio-Economic Change in South India in the 18th–19th Centuries*, Tokyo, 1986. Other relevant secondary literature includes publications by B. Stein, D. Ludden, N. Karashima, C. and S. S. Sivakumar. Some source material was published by the colonial administration as *Papers on Mirasi Right Selected from the Records of Government, and Published by Permission*, Madras, 1862.

⁷ This argument has already been hinted at in Mizushima, *Nattar and Socio-Economic Change*, p. 255 and Noboru Karashima, *Towards a New Formation: South Indian Society under Vijayanagar Rule*, Delhi, 1992, pp. 123–26. I have tried to substantiate it in Ahuja, *Die Erzeugung kolonialer Staatlichkeit*, chapter 5.2.

⁸ For a summary of these rights see *ibid*.

⁹ The differentiation of labour relations in agriculture was already noted by the early British collectors Lionel Place and F. W. Ellis. See *Papers on Mirasi*, pp. 19–20, 334–37 and Lionel Place, 'Report on the Jagir' (1799), OIOC, Board's Collection, Vol. 111 (F/4/111), § 75–79. Some historians have described (yet not sufficiently explained) these differences. Dharma Kumar, *Land and Caste in South India*, Cambridge, 1965, pp. 41–45. See also the important article by Benedicte Hjejle, 'Slavery and Agricultural Bondage in South India in the Nineteenth Century', *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, 2 (1–2), 1967, pp. 71–126, *Papers on Mirasi*, pp. 335–36. Other writers have ignored this phenomenon; e.g., Sivakumar, *Peasants and Nabobs*, p. 14.

¹⁰ Cf. David Ludden, 'Agrarian Commercialism in Eighteenth Century South India: Evidence from the 1823 Tirunelveli Census', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* (hereafter *IESHR*), 25(4), 1988, pp. 507, 514–16.

At the same time, the process of commercialisation created ample employment opportunities outside agriculture, occupational mobility, and thereby further pre-conditions for spatial mobility. In 1799, less than half of the population living in the so-called 'Company's Jagir' (an administrative division nearly identical with today's Chingleput district) was engaged in the cultivation of land.¹¹ Commercial manufacture, as a rule, was not located in port cities but rather in hinterland towns and villages, where new jobs were created, many of them for members of sub-ordinated castes. From the fifteenth century, market-oriented weaving was no longer confined to temple towns. In a process that has not been explained satisfactorily yet, so-called *payakatts*, agglomerations of weaving villages emerged in the Madras hinterland. There is evidence for a growing capacity of weavers to acquire land¹² but it also needs to be asked whether an extended demand for Coromandel textiles did not induce a considerable proportion of agriculturists to take up this occupation. Apparently, even *paraiyars* started weaving coarser varieties of cloth.¹³ Moreover, in commercial textile manufacture, new occupational opportunities were not limited to weaving. Village washermen (*vanniyar*), specialised in bleaching and dyeing export fabric, ceased to be village servants and migrated to towns.¹⁴ In Madras, where the finishing of Company cloth became increasingly concentrated from the final decades of the seventeenth century, a sizeable community of 'washermen' living in a separate settlement evolved.¹⁵ Spinning seems to have partly developed into a specialised occupation followed mainly by *paraiyars*. In Arni (Ponneri taluk), the main settlement of one of the most important *payakatts* of the 'Jagir', 396 houses were counted in a survey in 1771 out of which 90 were inhabited by weavers but 58 by *paraiyar* families engaged in cotton spinning which was, thus, more than an additional income source of agricultural labourers. Whole villages seem to have specialised in this line of textile production. The 'Jagir's' best yarn, it was said, was spun by *paraiyars* living in *palatayams*, the territories directly controlled

¹¹ Place, 'Report on the Jagir' (1799), p. 324 (§ 532). Unfortunately, no studies on non-agricultural rural occupations such as quarrying, the production of sugar, oil, salt, saltpetre, chunam and bricks are available for this region and period as yet.

¹² For *payakatts* see Sinnappah Arasaratnam, 'Weavers, Merchants and Company: The Handloom Industry in South-Eastern India 1750–1790', in Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ed., *Merchants, Markets and the State in Early Modern India*, Delhi, 1990, pp. 194–95, 201. For earlier settlement patterns and land acquisition by weavers see Vijaya Ramaswamy, *Textiles and Weavers in Medieval South India*, Delhi, 1985, pp. 16, 48–51, 101–3, 118–20.

¹³ Cf. David Washbrook, 'Land and Labour in Late Eighteenth Century South India: The Golden Age of the Pariah?', in Peter Robb, ed., *Dalit Movements and the Meanings of Labour in India*, Delhi, 1993, p. 80.

¹⁴ A.I. Chicherov, *India, Economic Development in the 16th–18th Centuries. Outline History of Crafts and Trade*, Moscow, 1971, pp. 64, 67–68.

¹⁵ See Sergio Aiolfi, *Calicos und gedrucktes Zeug, Die Entwicklung der englischen Textilveredlung und der Tuchhandel der East India Company, 1650–1750*, Stuttgart, 1987, pp. 304–6. For 'washing towns' in eighteenth century Madras city see Ahuja, *Die Erzeugung kolonialer Staatlichkeit*, chapters 5.7 and 6.5.

by *palaiyakkarars* (poligars).¹⁶ Here the dominant peasants' control over labourers may have been weaker and the marketing of valuable semi-finished products was probably safer than in most other places. Occupational mobility of *paraiyars* during the pre-colonial period is also indicated by a source quoted by N. Karashima, dated as early as the fifteenth century, which mentions *kativimai-paraiyar* (*paraiyar* artisans).¹⁷

Thus, if the hinterland population cannot be considered to have been immobile, this applies even more to the inhabitants of coastal towns. As Sinnappah Arasaratnam has observed, no dominant metropolis could emerge on the Coromandel coast until the late eighteenth century. On the contrary, urban foci seem to have shifted time and again, rising and falling in correspondence to a monotonous pattern.¹⁸ Accordingly, migration and communication was brisk along the coastline. For example, the *masula* or *kattamaram* boats required for embarkment and disembarkment in the roadstead of Madras city were plied by hundreds of fishermen stemming from various Tamil and Andhra coastal settlements. They partly came from remote areas and took up that dangerous but relatively well-paid job only temporarily or during certain seasons.¹⁹ Fishermen living in the distant Krishna delta thus proved to be well-informed about working conditions in the Madras roadstead when the East India Company's residents tried to recruit stevedores for the Presidency town in 1782–83.²⁰ Shifts in urban settlement patterns along the Coromandel coast were also connected with hinterland migration. When Pondicherry's importance as a commercial outlet rose in the early eighteenth century, there seems to have been a related southward migration of Carnatic spinners and weavers.²¹ The service requirements of commercial ports—among which Madras emerged as a major city in the late seventeenth century—offered job opportunities for tens of thousands of village artisans, agricultural labourers, fishermen and nomads on a temporary, seasonal or permanent basis.²² Labour force was thus

¹⁶ See the report on 'Jagir Payakatts' in OIOC, Madras Public Proceedings (hereafter MPP) (P/240/32) 9/8–31/12/1771, Appendix. See also Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *Maritime Commerce and English Power, Southeast India 1750–1800*, New Delhi, 1996, pp. 52, 184.

¹⁷ Karashima, *Towards a New Formation*, pp. 145–46.

¹⁸ Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast, 1650–1740*, New Delhi, 1986, pp. 31–32.

¹⁹ In 1784, for example, nearly 300 boatmen left Madras for their home towns which included Pondicherry, Tranquebar, and Cuddalore, OIOC, MPP (P/240/59) 27/6/1784, pp. 764–65. Influential boat owners reported 'that ever since His Majesty's Flag was established or hoisted in this Place there were no more People (who are natives & Inhabitants of this Place than to shove 14 or 15 Boats only & those other who were employed for all other Boats are such, that are came down here from the Southern & Northern Countries at the time of Famine or troubles of War [...]).' *Ibid.*, 7/12/1784, pp. 1229–30.

²⁰ OIOC, MPP (P/240/56) 10/1/1783, pp. 15–16.

²¹ Cf. Kirti Narayan Chaudhuri, 'The Structure of Indian Textile Industry in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *JESHR*, Vol. 11(2–3), 1974, pp. 145–46.

²² Madras labour history for the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries has not been a field of systematic research so far. Yet, we do find various references to sizeable communities of urban labourers even in published sources. See especially Henry Davison Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, New York, 1968 (1st edn 1913), Vols 1 & 2, *passim*. For later evidence see below.

bound to the soil to a lesser extent. A subsistence could be gained in various occupations and in many places, in urban settlements as well as in the countryside. Conversely, agricultural labourers and artisans who abandoned their villages could not be easily substituted. 'Land plenty and labour scarcity' was a constant factor allowing for a high degree of spatial and occupational mobility and strengthening labour's position in negotiations with masters and employers.²³

In the mid-eighteenth century, the social and political context changed. Almost continuous warfare and, no less importantly, the subsequent militarisation of the Carnatic economy, which implied the diversion of a considerable proportion of its resources into military channels, resulted in a reduction of cultivated acreage and agricultural productivity.²⁴ The Tamil country depended increasingly on grain imports from Andhra, Orissa and Bengal until the turn of the century when its agricultural production recovered to some extent.²⁵ The consequences of drought seasons were felt more severely, extended to serious famines and caused a drastic demographic downturn.²⁶ Moreover, war as well as the reduction and reallocation of resources led to numerous interruptions in textile production and to abrupt shifts in the demand for Coromandel cloth. Thus, not only weavers but artisans of all occupations involved in the production and refinement of textiles suffered critical losses of income.²⁷ Even so, high demand for labour subsisted. The East India Company's growing military and administrative apparatus created new employment opportunities. The size of the British troops in the Madras Presidency quadrupled from 12,000 in 1756 to 48,000 in 1782, out of which about 85 per cent were Indians.²⁸ The strength of Tipu Sultan's armed forces was even estimated at 110,000 in 1790.²⁹ Especially the regular infantry forces grew in importance and numbers

²³ Cf. David Washbrook, 'Law, State and Agrarian Society in Colonial India', *Modern Asian Studies* (hereafter *MAS*) Vol. 15(3), 1981, pp. 666–67. See also Sivakumar, *Peasants and Nabobs*, pp. 10, 35 (fn. 12).

²⁴ For the decline of agricultural productivity in the immediate Madras Hinterland (the 'Jagir') see OIOC, *The Diaries of George Paterson*, Vol. 7, pp. 135–36 (22/12/1773) and Place, 'Report on the Jagir' (1799), pp. 121–22 (§ 164).

²⁵ Cf. Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies and Commerce*, pp. 11, 164–67, 201, 209–10; Arasaratnam, *Maritime Commerce and English Power*, pp. 1–2, 257–59, 268, 313–14.

²⁶ Cf. Roland Lardinou, 'Deserted Villages and Depopulation in Rural Tamil Nadu c. 1780–c. 1830', in Tim Dyson, ed., *India's Historical Demography: Studies in Famine, Disease and Society*, London, 1989, pp. 23–33. See also Arasaratnam, *Maritime Commerce and English Power*, pp. 257–59, 268, 313–14.

²⁷ For a detailed account of the implications of war and war economy for the Coromandel textile production see Arasaratnam, *Maritime Commerce and English Power*, pp. 8–11 (1750s), 100–5 (1780/81), 132 (1786), 167–68 (1789).

²⁸ Cf. Robert Orme, *A History of the Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan from the Year MDCCXLV*, New Delhi, 1985 (second reprint of 1758 edn), Vol. 21, p. 85. See also Raymond Callahan, *The East India Company and Army Reform, 1783–1793*, Cambridge, Mass., 1972, p. 6; Holden Furber, 'Madras in 1787', in *Essays in Modern English History in Honor of W.C. Abbott*, Cambridge, Mass., 1941, p. 287.

²⁹ Burton Stein, *Thomas Munro: The Origins of the Colonial State and His Vision of Empire*, Delhi, 1989, p. 20.

which created new changes for occupational mobility as witnessed by Innes Munro in the early 1780s.

[T]he Europeans have [. . .] shewn that rigid discipline will make a soldier of a Pariah, the lowest of all castes; and now men of every tribe are indiscriminately enlisted for sepoys in the Company's service.³⁰

Thus agriculturists as well as weavers were regularly recruited as sepoys at least until the last decade of the century.³¹

The number of so-called 'camp followers' who accompanied armies on their marches exceeded that of soldiers by up to ten times. Many sources describe this phenomenon³²—see, for example, the two following accounts by German missionaries:

Yesterday afternoon our [the British Company's] army set out [. . .]. What a drag! The line had little resemblance with an army column in Germany. Apart from guns and ammunition carts there are as many other little carts as there are fighting men, each of them drawn by two oxen. There are six times more women, boys, porters, dooly and palanquin bearers, servants, grooms, oxen drivers and runners than men who bear arms.³³

I noticed with amazement the large crowd of people—men, women and children—that followed the army. The whole army consisted of 10,000 soldiers at most. The followers were about nine or ten times more. As soon as the column comes to a stand or the tents are being pitched the rabble will pour into all the surrounding villages and plunder all grain and livestock they can find. Colonel Fullerton [sic] tries to prevent and thwart them and has also hanged some of these looters. Yet the evil is too big and the number of these wicked people is too large.³⁴

The enormous size of these baggage trains was mainly due to logistic problems³⁵ but also to the large number of domestic servants employed by European offi-

³⁰ Innes Munro, *A Narrative of the Military Operations on the Coromandel Coast Against the Combined Forces of the French, Dutch, and Hyder Ally Cawn from the Year 1780 to the Peace in 1784 in a Series of Letters*, London, 1789, p. 71.

³¹ Cf. OIOC, MPP (P/240/65) 9/11/1786, pp. 2245–51. See also Arasarainam, *Maritime Commerce and English Power*, p. 121; Washbrook, 'Land and Labour', p. 79; and Henry Dodwell, *Sepoy Recruitment in the Old Madras Army*, Calcutta, 1922, pp. 14, 41.

³² For more details see Ahuja, *Die Erzeugung kolonialer Staatlichkeit*, chapter 4.3.

³³ *Neuere Geschichte der Evangelischen Missions-Anstalten zu Bekehrung der Heiden in Ostindien* (hereafter *Neuere Geschichte*), 25th Stueck, Halle 1782, pp. 66–67 (C.W. Gercke's Diary, Cuddalore, 16/6/1781), my translation.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 29th Stueck, Halle 1785, p. 566 (C.F. Schwarz's report on his journey to Mysore, 15/12/1783–26/1/1784), my translation.

³⁵ For example, according to contemporary calculations, the transport of cannons required one oxen for each pound of the projectile's weight (e.g., 32 oxen for a 32 pounder). For every 10 European foot soldiers one dooly (simple palanquin) with four bearers was considered necessary to carry them in case of wounding or illness. See Munro, *Narrative of Military Operations*, pp. 178, 184.

cers³⁶ and to the fact that the sepoys' families often followed their husbands and fathers.³⁷ In a way, military campaigns in that period can be understood as large-scale migratory movements. On the one hand, armies periodically attracted considerable numbers of labouring people by offering relatively lucrative jobs, thereby unsettling their and their families' mode of life in the most literal sense. On the other, as the latter of the reports quoted above indicates, these massive route columns caused displacement and further migration themselves. The fact that hundreds of thousands of people wandered from one agricultural settlement to the other in search of provisions and means of transport may have progressively swelled the baggage train as many inhabitants of the villages that had thereby been deprived of seed and draught animals joined it to find new means of subsistence.

The South Indian wars of the late eighteenth century created further labour demand (again, often on a periodical or seasonal basis) as they implied extensive fortification works, not the least in the Company's southern presidency town where sometimes more than 5,800 labourers were employed for this task.³⁸ In 1782, the number of former village artisans staying in Madras city who could be employed on the fortification works (bricklayers, carpenters, smiths, sawyers, 'hammer men' and 'bellow boys') was reckoned at 1,100.³⁹ Tankdiggers (members of the nomadic *ottar* or *uppliyar* castes) who had heretofore been engaged in the region's extensive irrigation works were much in demand—Paul Benefield who had been given a contract for expanding the fortifications of Fort St. George employed 1,400 of them in 1774.⁴⁰ Besides, thousands of *kulis*, labourers from the villages, were employed by the day. In 1768, for example, the Committee of Works stated that it was indispensable to recruit 2,500 to 3,000 'Tank Diggers and Coolies' from the hinterland.⁴¹ Thirteen years later, up to 7,000 'coolies' were employed in levelling 'Hog Hill', while extensive fortification works were being carried on at the same time.⁴²

Moreover, the cadre of British administrators and military officers in the Madras Presidency grew rapidly in the second-half of the century (the latter's number rose from a mere dozen in 1746 to 850 in 1788) and required thousands of domestic

³⁶ The number of domestic servants British subaltern officers were permitted to employ during campaigns was limited [sic] to 12 in 1782 to reduce the baggage train. Cf. Henry Dodwell, 'Transport and the Second Mysore War', *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, Vol. 3, 1924, pp. 267–69.

³⁷ Cf. Munro, *Narrative of Military Operations*, pp. 190–91.

³⁸ OIOC, Mackenzie Collection General (hereafter Mackenzie), Vol. 68, P. Ross to President & Select Committee, 17/9/1776.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, P. Ross to President & Select Committee, 17/10/1782.

⁴⁰ See Ahuja, *Die Erzeugung kolonialer Staatlichkeit*, chapters 4, 5, 7; also OIOC, MPP (P/240/37) 11/2/1774, p. 119.

⁴¹ OIOC, MPP (P/240/27) 20/8/1768, p. 654.

⁴² Cf. TNSA, *Military Consultations*, Vol. 73B, 29/1/1781, p. 243, *ibid.*, 6/2/1781, p. 424; *ibid.*, Vol. 73C, 19/2/1781, p. 531, *ibid.*, 26/2/1781, p. 594, *ibid.*, Vol. 74A, 3/4/1781, p. 884; *ibid.*, Vol. 74C, 13/5/1781, p. 1184–85.

servants to keep up a gentlemanly appearance. Dodwell considered between 12 and 15 servants indispensable for a 'gentleman's' house while at least three were employed even by badly paid subaltern officers.⁴³ In 1786, a German missionary noted that about 2,000 men were constantly engaged as palanquin bearers within the city bounds of Madras. This was a specialised occupation in which members of the *boyi* caste from the Andhra country were preferably employed.⁴⁴ The number of the various categories of porters ('head', 'back' and 'bamboo coolies') must have been much larger.⁴⁵ Another group of transport labourers, the 'boat men' working in the Madras roadstead, have already been mentioned—generally, their number seems to have amounted to about 1,000 during the latter-half of the eighteenth century.⁴⁶

Among others, *paraiyars*, members of the largest caste of agricultural labourers, were attracted to Madras in considerable numbers to work on the building sites or in the various service occupations mentioned above during the lean months, or throughout the year. Accordingly, by the end of the eighteenth century numerous *paraicheris* had developed in all parts of Madras city. There were twelve such *paraiyar* settlements comprising 295 habitations alone in the district of St. Thomé.⁴⁷ In 1792, the number of dwellings within the so-called 'Great Parcheri' in the northern part of modern George Town was reckoned at between 788 and 888 houses and huts of various qualities.⁴⁸ Not unreasonably, the population of that quarter of the city has been estimated at 5,000.⁴⁹ Though its name indicated a hamlet of agricultural labourers, it had (for contemporary standards) grown into a sizeable town controlled by influential and relatively prosperous headmen.⁵⁰ If we

⁴³ Henry Dodwell, *The Nabobs of Madras*, London, 1926, pp. 14, 39, 173, see also Furber, 'Madras in 1787', p. 287.

⁴⁴ *Neuere Geschichte*, 38th Stueck, Halle 1791, p. 173, OIOC MPP (P/240/64) 20/10/1786, pp. 1995–97, see also Edgar Thurston and K. Rangachari, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, New Delhi/Madras, 1987 (1st edn 1909), Vol. 1, pp. 218–22.

⁴⁵ The high demand and the various uses for these transport services can be grasped from the remarkably differentiated wage regulations of 1786 which were imposed on all denominations of Madras *kulis*. OIOC, MPP (P/240/64) 20/10/1786, p. 2007.

⁴⁶ See Ahuja, *Die Erzeugung kolonialer Staatlichkeit*, Table 3.2.

⁴⁷ TNSA, Revenue Sundries (hereafter RS), Vol. 27, Sami Nayaka to Board of Revenue, 1/9/1802.

⁴⁸ OIOC, Mackenzie, Vol. 69, Engineer Maule to Governor Oakeley, undated, approx. from April 1792.

⁴⁹ Cf. Susan Neild-Baru, 'Madras in 1800: Perceiving the City', in Howard Spodek and Doris Meth Srinivasan, eds, *Urban Form and Meaning in South Asia*, Hanover/London, 1993, p. 237.

⁵⁰ For the authority of the 'Great Parcheri' headmen see e.g., TNSA, Board of Revenue Proceedings, Vol. 153, 21/4/1796, pp. 3851–54; *ibid.*, 22/4/1796, pp. 3895–900, *ibid.*, 25/4/1796, pp. 4018–24. A missionary report of 1734 gives an idea of the type of regulations imposed on the settlement by its headmen, as it informs us of their resolution to confine prostitution to a remote quarter of the *paraicheri*. Cf., G.A. Francke, ed., *Bericht der Königlich-Dänischen Missionarien in Ostindien*, 37th–43rd Cont., Halle 1735–38, 1/6/1734, p. 440. Information on social differentiation within the 'Great Parcheri' can be gleaned from two surveys: (i) in 1792 the following buildings were counted 38 houses of brick and mud, 250 mud houses and 500–600 huts (see fn. 48); (ii) in 1793 the estimated value of *paraiyar* houses ranged between 20 and 2,000 *Pagodas* (2.5 *Pagodas* were usually converted to about £ 1). Cf. TNSA, RS, Vol. 27, Sami Nayaka to Board of Revenue, 20/5/1793.

accept that (a) the population of Madras city can be realistically estimated at 150,000 during the latter-half of the eighteenth century⁵¹ out of which (b) about 20 per cent were *paraiyars* (as in the following century),⁵² we can conclude that about 30,000 *paraiyars* lived in Madras. Many of them—men, women and children—, like numerous members of other castes, must have been employed on building sites or in service occupations.⁵³

High demand for labour improved working people's bargaining position and resulted in persistently rising wages from the middle to the end of the century. Data gleaned from various records and private papers indicate that Madras nominal wages at least doubled during that period. Thus *kulis*, palanquin bearers and peons who usually had earned less than one *pagoda* per month in the 1750s were paid about two *pagodas* in the century's last decade. The wages of skilled craftsmen (such as carpenters and smiths) employed in the Company's service rose from about 1¼ *pagoda* in the 1750s to almost three *pagodas* in 1803.⁵⁴ It is far more difficult to establish what the nominal pay rises meant in real terms. Yet, my data collection permits to conclude that grain prices were rather subject to frequent hikes usually followed by equally dramatic slumps than to a general upwards movement corresponding to that of the wages. Hence, it is likely that late eighteenth century wages in Madras increased in real terms too. These findings seem to support David Washbrook's argument of a 'golden age of the Pariah'.⁵⁵ Yet, this formulation reflects only one aspect of a Janus-faced situation. Viewed from another angle, it appears that this 'golden age' could also encounter plebeians in an iron armour because the tendency of 'mobility' frequently materialised as flight—flight from plundering and marauding horsemen, flight from dearth and famine, flight from *corvée* and other variations of forced labour. Evidence for this is abundant. For our present purposes, let us hear a British captain's report to the Governor-in-Council on his activities in 1781:

Agreeable to your desire [. . .], I have been endeavouring all in my power to procure Cooleys and Bullocks to send to Madras [. . .] the Poor People hearing that the Cooleys are pressed every where for Camp, have left this Village to hide themselves, & as there will be no possibility of Getting volunteer Cooleys, I have sent people out to press them ⁵⁶

⁵¹ See Ahuja, *Die Erzeugung kolonialer Staatlichkeit*, chapter 2.3

⁵² Susan Neill, 'Colonial Urbanism: The Development of Madras City in the 18th and 19th Centuries', *MAS*, Vol. 13(2), 1979, p. 227

⁵³ See e.g., a petition of the inhabitants of the 'Great Parcheri' in which they represented themselves as 'menial Servants to the Gentlemen and Ladies of this Settlement' and gave a detailed account of their various occupations which, it should be noted, did not include that of an agricultural labourer, cf., Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, Vol. 3, p. 165

⁵⁴ Ahuja, *Die Erzeugung kolonialer Staatlichkeit*, Appendix 8.4, Tables 8.3–8.13, pp. 405–12

⁵⁵ Washbrook, 'Land and Labour', p. 79.

⁵⁶ TNSA, Military Consultations, Vol. 76A, 9/9/1781, P. 2436

New 'job opportunities' were at times rather a menace than a chance. The Carnatic wars may not have demanded an excessive blood toll from the inhabitants as compared to the apocalyptic standards of our own 'age of extremes'. Yet, the economic consequences of ongoing warfare manifested themselves in frequent price hikes and severe famines, most dramatically in 1781–83, diminishing the population directly or through subsequent epidemics, destroying not only the crops but also the means of production (most importantly, irrigation works and draught bullocks), triggering flight to fortified towns within the region as well as mass emigration to Mysore at the same time.⁵⁷ In 1784, Robert Palk, the former President of Fort St. George, received a letter from George Baker, his commercial agent in Madras, with the following description of the country:

We are Indeed in Quiet Possession of the Carnatick, but it is Desolated to the Extent of any Representation that I have seen of it; Depopulated, Uncultivated, and Deprived of its Manufactures of Course. And, What I Conceive It be no Inconsiderable thing, its Stock of Cattle of every Species Exhausted, by the Destruction or Pillage of the late Enemy, or the Consumption of the Army, Settlement, and Squadron, for Draught, Carryage, and Food[;] a Cuntry [sic], in such a State, surely requires time to recover itself, before it Can Either furnish the Sinews of War, the means of Commerce, or a Source [sic] for Revenue ⁵⁸

A survey of the 'Jagir's' villages, recorded in January 1783, summed up that 2,148 out of 2,265 villages had been utterly destroyed and depopulated.⁵⁹ The survivors partly and slowly returned to the villages after warfare had disappeared from the Madras hinterland. In the 'Company's Jagir', 3,076 'inhabitants cultivators' (most probably, agricultural labourers were not included in this category) oversaw the cultivation of 12,690 acres of land with 6,247 ploughs in *fasli* 1193 (1783–84). The following year's count stated 6,098 'inhabitants cultivators', 42,806 acres of cultivated land and 14,410 ploughs. In the same period, the number of weavers living in the Jagir rose from 644 to 2,094, that of shopkeepers from 203 to 580.⁶⁰ Yet, even in 1795, after 12 years of relative tranquillity, it was reckoned that the Jagir's population amounted to only about 50 per cent of what it had been in 1780.⁶¹ Thus, mobility in many cases was more an involuntary reaction to existential perils than a result of free choice.

⁵⁷ According to Washbrook, there was a major difference between eighteenth century military conflicts in North and South India. In the latter part of the continent, the economic base was seriously affected. Washbrook, 'Land and Labour', p. 82. See Lardinois, 'Deserted Villages', which is the most relevant publication at hand. I have presented additional material in Ahuja, *Die Erzeugung kolonialer Staatlichkeit*.

⁵⁸ OIOC, Palk MSS (IOR Neg 4382), No. 383, G. Baker to R. Palk, 10/10/1784. For similar descriptions see *ibid.*, No. 389, Chocapah Chetty to R. Palk, 2/2/1785; *ibid.*, No. 400, Pelling & DeFries to R. Palk, 12/6/1785.

⁵⁹ TNSA, Jaghure Records, Vol. 2, 20/1/1783, pp. 9–10.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. 5, 2/12/1785, Richard Dighton's reports for *faslis* 1193 and 1194, pp. 102–3.

⁶¹ Lionel Place, 'Report on the Jagir', 6/10/1795, in OIOC, Board's Collection, Vol. 31 (F/4/31),

At the same time, frequent and massive migratory movements cracked local power structures, hierarchic and 'immobilising' social ties. A detailed description of one specific type of such changes can be found in the Collector Lionel Place's report of 1795:

The natural vocation of a great part of those who now crowd [Madras], is Husbandry. Mechanical Occupations were originally invented for it, and confined to the Village Boundary . . . In the War of 1780, however, some of each Classes were driven into foreign Exile, and others sought refuge in Madras. During a long interval, these were precluded from returning to their Houses, and in that time felt new attractions, which extinguished the desire of a great part to do so. Public exigency and private luxury gave the Artizan in particular immediate lucrative occupation, he soon acquired skill, was rewarded accordingly; and then found a[s] i[t] would be superfluous in his Village, so it would be inadequately requited there, but as he possessed Property in it, which he was averse to relinquish, if he could not find a Substitute of whose inferior Abilities he could prevail on the Village to accept, he returned to execute it's Service, and when performed again, resorted to the Metropolis; which accounts for a number of all Classes of Mechanicks in Madras being Meerassydars, and of their repugnance, as I have experienced, to be called to the Duties, which, by the tenure of their Property, they owe to the Circar.⁶²

Carpenters and smiths tried to take advantage of high urban wages while retaining their village rights. Subletting of village 'offices' and seasonal labour can be discerned as alternative strategies. War had 'unsettled' their lives that were now less confined to one locality and involved more travelling between town and village. Hence their relations to their home village's dominant peasants were bound to change. As for agricultural labourers, fisherfolk and other plebeian groups, there is evidence for similar patterns of seasonal or permanent migration to the city.⁶³

Spatial mobility, originally a result of sixteenth to eighteenth century commercialisation, was thus reshaped and carried over into the second-half of the eighteenth century by the destructive-as-well-as-creative forces of war. Even when *Pax Britannica* had been largely established over the Tamil country, the rate of migration remained amazingly high for some time. In the course of the agricultural year, 1797-98 about 11 per cent of the 'Jagir's' total population moved out of one of its districts and/or newly settled in one of them.⁶⁴ The morphology and social structure of Madras city was necessarily affected by these social and political processes. A

⁶² Place, 'Report on the Jagir', 6/10/1795, § 20-21, the term '*mirasidar*' here does not designate a *kannyatchikkarakar* (dominant peasant) but a possessor of hereditary village rights in general. In this case it refers to the artisans' hereditary right to a share of the village's produce and to the usufruct of certain pieces of village land. Cf. H.H. Wilson, *A Glossary of the Judicial and Revenue Terms* [. . .], London, 1855, pp. 342-43.

⁶³ Ahuja, *Die Erzeugung kolonialer Staatlichkeit*, chapters 3, 4 3-4, 5.6-7

⁶⁴ See Place, 'Report on the Jagir' (1799), Appendix C

high level of mobility within the region did not only cause fluidity and shifts in the city's population and settlement patterns, notably in unfortified and loosely administered 'suburban' or fringe areas.⁶⁵ It also conditioned the city's social relations, fostered and shaped conflicts about labour, taxation and property rights over urban ground.⁶⁶

By the end of the eighteenth century the political and social context in which labour relations were produced and reproduced changed again. Mysore's decisive defeat in the battle of Srirangapatnam (1799) can serve as a chronological marker for the replacement of the region's polycentric political structure by a centralised military regime based in Madras which now emerged as South India's unchallengeable capital. After rival powers had been extinguished or subordinated, the pivot of the Company regime's activities was neither promoting textile exports nor extending its military power—increasing land revenue was. Though textile production seems to have recovered to some extent after the second Anglo-Mysore war,⁶⁷ the age of the weaver was gone for good; so was the age of the sepoy and the *kuli*—the armies of rival and allied powers were disbanded, the colonial army could be reduced in number and, even more importantly, troops in garrison required, as we have already seen, much less human resources than armies in the field.⁶⁸ What now began was the age of the raiyat. Providing agriculture with labour power became one of the colonial regime's major concerns and a policy of peasantisation and sedentarisation was pursued accordingly.⁶⁹ As Eugene Irschick has demonstrated recently for the Chingleput District, in the course of the nineteenth century the rural people in the hinterland of Madras were 'fixed to their respective villages'. According to Irschick, a static historical image was construed in a 'dialogical' process by colonial administrators and *kaniyatchikkarars*, the dominant agrarian class. This image corresponded to current notions of social order shared by both constituents of that alliance and was an appropriate means to invigorate their dominance:

[T]he constructions of the normative past denied both physical mobility and social contestation in an effort to illustrate a decayed present and to suggest the characteristics necessary for the future.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ One case in point is that of Chintadripet which historians have generally described as a stable weaving suburb of Madras from 1735 to the end of the century. Yet, a scrutiny of the sources permits the conclusion that most of the weavers left the settlement only a few years after its foundation, that it was repeatedly destroyed and depopulated in wartime and probably ceased to be a weaving suburb altogether by 1770. Cf. Ahuja, *Die Erzeugung kolonialer Staatlichkeit*, chapter 4.2.

⁶⁶ Cf., *ibid.*, chapter 6.5.

⁶⁷ Cf. Arasaratnam, *Maritime Commerce and English Power*, pp. 128–31, 162–63.

⁶⁸ For the reduction of the 'service section' after the establishment of colonial rule see Dharma Kumar, 'The Forgotten Sector: Services in Madras Presidency in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century', *IESHR*, Vol. 24(4), 1987, pp. 367–93.

⁶⁹ This is already discernible in Lionel Place's revenue reports on the 'Company's Jagir' from the 1790s. See e.g., the paragraph on village artisans quoted above.

⁷⁰ Eugene Irschick, *Dialogue and History. Constructing South India, 1795–1895*, Delhi, 1994, p. 77.

The metaphor of 'dialogue'—like many concepts drawn from a linguistic nomenclature—may not be adequate as it represents an alliance of unequal forces in terms of open communication. However, Irschick's observations on an increasing fixity of settlement behaviour realised by the united efforts of colonial rulers and dominant peasants should not be lost.

To conclude this section—the process of commercialisation created a tendency of social and spatial mobility in the Madras region. This tendency was carried forward and modified by the militarisation of the region's economic, social and political structure from the middle of the eighteenth century. It was reversed after the creation of a centralised territorial state with distinct 'neo-absolutist' (C.A. Bayly) and colonial features that permitted to limit labour mobility by intervention and induce a process of sedentarisation and peasantisation. However, in the second-half of the eighteenth century volatility of settlement behaviour was a crucial feature of social life in Madras city and in the surrounding region, having implications for the formation of social relations as well as colonial institutions. Plebeian high mobility was one of the major preconditions on which labour relations were formed. It was a factor not to be ignored by the Madras hegemonic block, by its (increasingly colonial) European and its (increasingly compradore) indigenous constituents, when they searched for appropriate means for the recruitment, subordination and surveillance of plebeian groups, the majority of the town's population.

'The Ultimate Resource Against Oppression': Collective Withdrawal as a Form of Protest

Tendencies of social and spatial mobility could only materialise through conscious human praxis which was informed by the accumulated experience of the various conflicting agencies and their cultural environment. Consequently, social praxis created specific, concrete-historical forms of mobility. Various social groups settled with mobility, worked out adequate forms of social organisation such as seasonal labour and (not necessarily ancient) nomadic modes of existence, to solve problems arising therefrom. The tendency towards mobility could also be appropriated as a weapon, as a means of social conflict. Company records refer to this phenomenon invariably as 'desertion', indicating a collective withdrawal from a territory under the authority of a political power. Regional and local rulers were confronted time and again by various plebeian and other social groups with this form of voluntary mobility. This phenomenon may be more appropriately termed 'flight as a form of protest' or 'collective withdrawal', since it can neither be understood as an individual, spontaneous response to existential perils, nor as a positive decision to migrate to a more favourable environment. What we find instead is *collective action*, usually planned well in advance and calculated to enforce concrete demands.

In South India, collective withdrawal was an old technique of insubordination that had been developed and tested over centuries. Burton Stein called it the 'ultimate weapon of the peasant' against 'an overlord whose demands have come

to exceed the benefits of the protection of his overlordship'.⁷¹ Yet, collective withdrawal was not only used by the different agricultural classes as a form of protest. There is also evidence for various cases of 'en masse desertion' of South Indian weavers from the fifteenth century onwards. Weavers withdraw collectively from their villages to put pressure on rulers whose taxation demands appeared to them unacceptable.⁷² *Kammala* artisans (carpenters, stone masons and various types of smiths) articulated their protest in the same manner.⁷³ Even mercantile groups employed this technique of social conflict frequently (and often successfully) as sources from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries suggest.⁷⁴

It is possible to assume that the historical context of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, namely the processes of commercialisation and militarisation, the coincidence of conditions of 'land plenty and labour scarcity' with a polycentric political structure, facilitated and invigorated the utilisation of this technique of protest. In any case, seventeenth and eighteenth century sources⁷⁵ as well as the respective historiographical literature witness numerous instances of collective withdrawal. Stein's characterisation of this form of protest can be found in nearly the same words in the records of Fort St. George of 1796, where it was described as the 'ultimate resource against the oppression of the Zemindar'.⁷⁶ Several historians have presented narratives and divergent interpretations of specific incidents of collective withdrawal in an agrarian context, directed against the Company regime in the late eighteenth century.⁷⁷ S.S. Sivakumar has assigned a 'right of desertion' to subordinated agrarian labourers that was usually directed against the *kaniyatchikkarars* but was also, in some cases, turned by the latter into a weapon against political rulers.⁷⁸ Reacting to the Company's—ultimately successful—endeavours to force them into new relations of production, Coromandel weavers offered stiff, even violent, resistance, frequently absconding from the Company's territory. Arasaratnam has called this technique of protest the 'ultimate weapon',⁷⁹

⁷¹ Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India*, Delhi, 1994 (1st edn 1980), p. 19. The term *arimampugalidam* (asylum for those who are afraid) was apparently used in mediaeval inscriptions when referring to villages that gave shelter to inhabitants of another village which they had had occasion to leave. This information I owe to Dr K. V. Raman, Professor (em.) of Madras University.

⁷² Ramaswamy, *Textiles and Weavers*, pp. 92, 120–21.

⁷³ Chicherov, *India, Economic Development*, pp. 35–36.

⁷⁴ Amiya Kumar Bagchi, 'Merchants and Colonialism', in D. N. Panigrahi, ed., *Economy, Society and Politics in Modern India*, New Delhi, 1985, p. 8.

⁷⁵ Various incidents of collective withdrawal involving merchants are mentioned in Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, Vols 1 and 2, *passim*.

⁷⁶ *Papers on Mirasi*, p. 28 ('Extract from the Minute of Consultation, dated 8 January 1796', § 17).

⁷⁷ Irshick, *Dialogue and History*, *passim*, especially pp. 29–30, 44–48, 54–66; Sivakumar, *Peasants and Nabobs*, *passim*, especially pp. 45–46, 48–62.

⁷⁸ S.S. Sivakumar, 'Transformation of the Agrarian Economy in Tondaimandalam 1760–1900', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 6(10), 1978, pp. 26–27. Sivakumar has partly renounced this article recently, cf. *idem*, *Peasants and Nabobs*, p. 76.

⁷⁹ Arasaratnam, *Maritime Commerce and English Power*, p. 199.

which lost its cutting edge only by the end of the century when the Company had gained control over the whole of South India.⁸⁰ Scholars who have studied conflicts between right-hand and left-hand castes (*valangai/idangai*) have outlined how these hierarchical caste alliances confronted the European companies time and again with the threat to leave their settlements.⁸¹ While powerful mercantile castes, in Madras as in other places, usually lead the way, plebeians participated in these protests and gained experience in using this multipurpose technique of social conflict. As early as in 1653, weavers and chintz painters collectively withdrew from Madras in the course of a *valangai/idangai* conflict.⁸² A similar confrontation occurred again in 1707 when boatmen, bleachers, fisher people and artisans of various occupations absconded to neighbouring St. Thome which was well outside the Company's jurisdiction at that time.⁸³

For the second-half of the eighteenth century, there is evidence for three to four instances of collective withdrawal of Madras 'boatmen' (stevedores). The Company depended on this occupational group for disembarking and embarking passengers, troops and goods, for securing supplies for men of war as well as for the garrison. The boatmen were thus in a strong bargaining position. They were not led by merchants in these conflicts, but by *maistries* of their own (presumably fisher) caste. In 1756, their withdrawal was a full success: an attempt by the Governor-in-Council to assume more direct control over this branch had to be given up after eight months of struggle. Even the threat to confiscate houses and boats of those who had absconded had failed to make any impression.⁸⁴ George Taswell, Master Attendant of Madras, reminded the Governor-in-Council 20 years later of this embarrassing experience:

It was some time in Mr. Pigots Government when near half of those People employed in the Boats suddenly [sic] deserted the Place under Pretence of Grievance nor could they be induced to return until their demands were complied with after which from a Minute enquiry into particulars it was discovered the above Desertion was occasioned by the private Directions of the Head Man & not by the Inclination of the People ⁸⁵

There is evidence for further incidents of collective withdrawal of sections of this occupational group for the years 1780–82 (one or two incidents), and 1797.⁸⁶

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, *passim*, especially pp 60–64, 70–75, 123–25, 132–34, 139, 198–99, 216–17

⁸¹ The most detailed study at hand is Niels Brimnes, *European Authority and Caste Disputes in South India: British and Danish Perspectives*, unpublished D Phil diss., Cambridge, 1995, see especially chapters 4–6, 9

⁸² Ramaswamy, *Textiles and Weavers*, pp 162–64

⁸³ Brimnes, *European Authority and Caste Disputes*, chapter 4

⁸⁴ OIOC, MPP (P/240/13) 30/12/1755, pp 575–76; OIOC, MPP (P/240/14) 19/1/1756, p 25; *ibid.*, 5/4/1756, pp 140–41, *ibid.*, 19/7/1756, pp 346–47; *ibid.*, 6/9/1756, pp 494–96

⁸⁵ OIOC, MPP (P/240/42) 22/11/1776, p. 760

⁸⁶ OIOC, MPP (P/240/51) 25/8/1780, pp. 705–7, OIOC, MPP (P/240/52) 31/4/1781, p 305, OIOC, MPP (P/240/55) 22/11/1782, p 1233, *ibid.*, 3/12/1782, pp 1322–37; OIOC, MPP (P/241/73) 28/7/1797, pp 2327–34, OIOC, MPP (P/242/1) 22/12/1797, pp 4045–46

Other plebeian groups in Madras had their own axes to grind. In 1750, the carpenters and smiths employed by the Company 'deserted in a general Body' in protest against the practices of the English master carpenter John Moore, which the records characterise as 'tyranny'.⁸⁷ In 1773, the Company convinced labourers who had been engaged for the fortification works to accept their wages in rice at the current market price. Trouble arose when the labourers realised that they were being served decayed grain. A British observer noted in his private diary:

[T]he people who work all day in the heat of the Sun, and who require wholesome food for the Wages which they dearly earn, appear so much dissatisfied that they daily complain to the Superintending Engineer; and finding no redress notwithstanding Col. Ross's repeated application to the Governor; they are leaving the Works so fast that one hundred less were mustered yesterday than Saturday.⁸⁸

In 1783, Master Attendant J. Thomson insisted in paying wages instead of a share of the salvage money to the anchor divers and threatened to flog them if they refused. In response, that small but indispensable occupational group left Madras and returned only after three days of hard bargaining.⁸⁹ In the course of a conflict between Kanchipuram *valangai/ldangai* in 1785 in which one Srinivasan, an agrarian magnate or *nattar*, led the former faction, the *valangai* caste carpenters retaliated by collectively absconding to the 'Arcot Province'.⁹⁰ In August 1795, Lionel Place complained that a gang of bricklayers who had been recruited in St. Thome to repair irrigation tanks in the Jagir had 'deserted' the works, leaving him 'much distressed'. The *maistry*, who had engaged them, apparently had not fulfilled his obligations and when a negotiator whom the bricklayers had delegated did not meet with success they decided to abscond by and by, thus bringing the works to a complete standstill. The Collector grew more irritated and contemplated the application of force as not even the threat to confiscate their houses could convince the bricklayers to return.⁹¹ While several authors have reported various instances of collective withdrawal, there has neither been the acknowledgement that this was a fairly widespread technique of protest nor the attempt to locate this phenomenon in its concrete historical context. The main reason for this may be found in the obsolete yet still prevailing demarcation of commercial and agrarian, of maritime and territorial history. If we choose to examine coastal settlements and commercial emporia in their agrarian context, we see that the application of this technique of protest was not limited to one or the other social group, neither to town nor to

⁸⁷ Records of Fort St. George (hereafter RFSG), Diaries and Consultation Books, 19/2/1749/50, p. 81.

⁸⁸ OIOC, Paterson Diaries, Vol. 4, 14/2/1773, p. 181.

⁸⁹ OIOC, MPP (P/240/56) 6/6/1783, p. 738.

⁹⁰ TNSA, Jaghire Records, Vol. 4, 25/6/1785, pp. 141-43.

⁹¹ TNSA, Chingleput District Records, Vol. 446, 7/8/1795, pp. 233-35. Unfortunately, the respective pages of this record are partly decayed. Therefore, see also the summary in TNSA, Chingleput District Guide to the Records from 1735 to 1835, p. 68.

countryside but was an element of a regional political culture. It could be implemented by local elites and subordinated labourers; it was serviceable to mercantile castes as well as to agriculturists or artisans. Various social groups utilised it in alliances with others or independently, as a weapon against political overlords or against each other. The leadership of dominant peasants or merchants in instances of collective withdrawal has been repeatedly emphasised by various authors, and, indeed, they were often in a position to launch and direct protests. Yet, it has been argued here that plebeian social groups were capable to create leaders from their own ranks to meet the organisational requirements of this type of collective action. There is even evidence for autonomous protest of *paraiyars* who represented not only the majority of agricultural labourers but also, as we have seen, a large share of the towns' 'unskilled' manual labour force. Henry Brooke, garrison paymaster in Wandiwash, reported in 1761, that the 'coolies' he was employing 'have made frequent Struggles to get their Wages increased by deserting the Works'.⁹² In another incident of insubordination, *paraiyars* can be more clearly identified as autonomous agents. When the Governor-in-Council in 1770 complied to a request of a catholic priest and banned the display of the elephant flag on processions to St. Thomas Mount, *paraiyars* rose in protest, in this case not using the technique of collective withdrawal but rather organising a strike of domestic servants.⁹³

Within one incident of flight-as-protest, the several allied social groups could be actuated by divergent purposes and could play different roles in different stages of the contest. A case in which these variations became most apparent was a long-drawn conflict between the Company's Cuddalore Resident G.I. Hoissard and the *valangai* castes of that town in 1786. The driving force of this instance of collective withdrawal (which was mainly directed against Hoissard's plans to introduce municipal taxes) were neither merchants nor *kaniyatchikkars* but the highly specialised chintz painters. Yet merchants, weavers, bleachers, potters, *paraiyars* and other groups of the urban population joined in too. The various jatis coordinated their actions. However, the alliance broke up as the divergent targets of its constituents became visible. Chintz painters and merchants, on the one hand, returned to Cuddalore after a couple of weeks when the Governor-in-Council in Madras rebuked Hoissard for his unwarranted actions and replaced him with another Company servant. The weavers, on the other hand, continued their protest, which had not only been directed against municipal taxes, but also, as became apparent now, against a specific type of the putting-out system by which they found themselves bound in a dependent relationship similar to wage labour.⁹⁴

The causes of the numerous incidents of collective withdrawal varied, as we have seen, widely in their political and social content. There are, of course, substantial differences between struggles of castes over ritual precedence, resistance

⁹² OIOC, MPP (P/240/19) 7/1/1761, p. 17.

⁹³ OIOC, *Patterson Diaries*, Vol. 2, 17/12/1770, pp. 116–22; see also *ibid.*, Vol. 4, 19/12/1772, pp. 90–91.

⁹⁴ OIOC, MPP (P/240/63) 9/6/1786, pp. 826–55; *ibid.*, 20/6/1786, pp. 962–76; *ibid.*, 30/6/1786, p. 1062, *ibid.*, 8/7/1786, p. 1085; OIOC, MPP (P/240/64) 21/8/1786, pp. 1448–63.

of town people against the attempts of 'white-faced aliens' to introduce taxes and conflicts about labour relations or wages. Cultural, political and socio-economic factors could combine in various ways to induce this form of collective action. From our own (twentieth century) experience, we know that mass demonstrations can serve very different purposes so that formal analyses are insufficient to understand their character. Correspondingly, differences between the various incidents of flight-as-protest in the eighteenth century Madras region should not be blurred. Yet, it seems to be not irrelevant to ask why specific forms of collective action are used more often in certain historical periods than others. In this article the question arises why collective withdrawal appears to have been the most frequent form of collective protest in this specific historical context. In search of an answer, we now turn to the *sequence of events* within the various instances. These could again differ considerably from each other—indeed, one case of collective withdrawal could closely resemble a strike, while another could develop into long-term emigration. Yet, four features can be discerned repeatedly:

1. The political ruler, usually the *adversary* in this type of conflicts, was frequently *informed about plans of desertion before they were actually implemented*. We know very little about the process of decision-making which anticipated the actual protests, except that heads of castes seem to have played a crucial role at least in some cases.⁹⁵ As news of 'desertion' plans often reached even the ears of European power-holders before their implementation, it may be suspected that a rather large number of persons were involved in that process. It is also quite possible that absolute secrecy was not even intended. There may well have been the calculation that the sheer threat of collective withdrawal was a sufficient deterrent to convince the opponent that his objectives were impolitic as the losses to be expected in case of collective resistance were too high.
2. The deserters were often quite explicit that they pursued only specific, *limited demands* and did not intend to settle in another place permanently. This may be the meaning of the symbolism of weavers' protest of which a Company letter to London in 1736 gave the following description:

[T]he Weavers when disgusted leave lighted Lamps in their Houses and remove to some other part of the Country, so that whole Towns are deserted in a Night.⁹⁶

The 'deserters' thus pointed out that their action was neither spontaneous nor individual nor irreversible but a well-calculated and *collective* form of protest.

⁹⁵ In conflicts between Company and boatmen the *maistris* often took the lead—see above. During the Cuddalore events of 1786, referred to above, a *dashan* (presumably a *desayi*, i.e., a headman of *walangai* castes) seems to have played an important role. OIOC, MPP (P/240/63) 20/6/1786, pp. 962–76.

⁹⁶ RFSG, Despatches to England 1736–1740, letter from Port St. George, 13/1/1736, para 29, p. 3.

The burning lamp in every house was a collective message to their opponent. A more detailed enquiry into the symbolic meaning of this message could be intriguing. However, for the moment, suffice it to refer to Roland Lardinois's observation that only in Carnatic revenue records a curious Persian term was used to describe deserted villages: '*be-chirag*', without lamp.⁹⁷ A village where houses were still illuminated was, accordingly, not irreversibly deserted. In many cases, the protesters would not withdraw any further than to the nearest place outside the reach of their opponent. They would stay as near as possible to their homes, as for example the Madras *valangai* castes who sought refuge in St. Thome in 1707 and again in 1716, just a few hundred meters south but sufficiently safe from the Company's limited powers at that time.⁹⁸ In some cases women and children were even left behind⁹⁹—the protesters' desire to solve the conflict through negotiation could not have been expressed more clearly.

3. The protesters often confronted their opponent with their *determination to settle in a more advantageous environment if their demands were not complied with*. Various incidents of collective withdrawal continued for months and there were no fixed limits between flight as a form of protest and permanent emigration. Mass emigration of whole occupational groups remained a risk for the early colonial administration until the end of the century, a risk it was often quite reluctant to take because Company officials could always feel other regional powers breathing down their neck when labour relations and wages were negotiated. When a 'Committee of Regulation' set about in 1786 to fix wages in Madras city, the military Chief Engineer insisted that the Committee's secretary should first enquire the current wages in Pondicherry.¹⁰⁰ Three months later, the same committee proposed to the Governor-in-Council to assign a contract to one Polycondah Chitty, a fishers' *malistry*, for supplying all Madras markets with fish. The Council was generally in favour of this proposal but cautioned the Committee to make sure 'that no Political Evil results therefrom by its being the cause of the Principle Fishermen or Catamaran men quitting the Roads and going to a Foreign Settlement'.¹⁰¹ They well knew the risk. The English East India Company had variously experienced that weavers on which they had tried to impose direct control had sought refuge in French or Dutch settlements where they were readily received.¹⁰² As late as in 1799, when there was hardly any

⁹⁷ Cf., Lardinois, 'Deserted Villages', pp. 17, 44 (fn. 3). In Mughal records, another Persian term, *uran*, was used in this context.

⁹⁸ Cf., Love, *Heritage of Old Madras*, Vol. 2, pp. 25–30, 141–43. See also Brunnes, *European Authority and Caste Disputes*, chapter 4.

⁹⁹ For example, in Cuddalore in 1778; see Arasaratnam, *Maritime Commerce and English Power*, p. 71.

¹⁰⁰ OIOC, MPP (P/240/64) 20/10/1786, pp. 2004–5.

¹⁰¹ OIOC, MPP (P/240/66) 9/2/1787, pp. 169–70.

¹⁰² Cuddalore weavers, for example, knew well that they would be warmly received in neighbouring Pondicherry. Cf., OIOC, MPP (P/240/63) 8/7/1786, p. 1085; OIOC, MPP (P/240/64) 21/8/1786, p. 1455. For another case in a different area see OIOC, MPP (P/240/63) 13/7/1786, pp. 1147–52. See also Arasaratnam, *Maritime Commerce and English Power*, pp. 62–63, 123–25, 199.

place to go for plebeians who intended to withdraw themselves from the Company's sway—even then, old anxieties left traces in the records. The Justices of the Peace, while demanding that obedience had to be enforced on the palanquin bearers whose 'extortion[s] and misbehaviour' were greatly distressing the 'public', thought it politic to add:

We are fully aware that some temporary inconvenience will arise upon the first Publication of the order by a Partial desertion of the Boys, but we think it will soon subside, when it is discovered that such Order cannot be evaded.¹⁰³

4. There is some evidence that protesters who had been able to force a political power to submit to their demands were yet not fully contented with this result. In some cases, they required one additional concession, namely, the permission to return into town in a triumphal parade. Again, it is Cuddalore which provides for the most fascinating material. After the chintz painters had gained full victory over the Company resident, they insisted on a solemn procession on which their caste insignia would be presented and music be played. Apparently, they wished to be ceremoniously *repossessed of their rights and privileges* which had been violated by the political ruler in the course of the conflict. They were not thieves, they argued, and the Company's refusal to permit the procession reinvigorated the conflict to such an extent that a frightened new Company resident wrote alarmed letters to Madras on the 'State of Rebellion' in Cuddalore, on his apprehensions that 'the Fugitives will attempt to insult him in his office' and requested a life guard.¹⁰⁴ Niels Brimnes has described similar occurrences in the Danish factory of Tranquebar.¹⁰⁵ From the Vijayanagara period onwards, symbolic privileges had been increasingly important for artisan jatis like *kaikkolar* weavers or *kammalas*. As their economic situation improved, they sought an amelioration of their social status too. *Sangu* and *tandu*, to blow the conch shell and to use a palanquin, were among the most important of these privileges which also included the display of caste insignia.¹⁰⁶ When mercantile and artisanal groups entered into conflict with representatives of European East India Companies and other political powers, not only narrowly economic issues but also matters of ritual precedence were at stake as these represented symbolically their communities' right to self-governance and their immunity rights from political interference.

These seem to be some of the features of this form of protest. At this point, we return to the question of how this phenomenon may be termed most appropriately. The contemporary formulation, coined by Company officials, appears adequate and has been widely accepted, as we have seen, by today's historians.

¹⁰³ TNSA, Public Department Proceedings, Vol. 238B, 27/8/1799, p. 3055

¹⁰⁴ OIOC, MPP (P/240/63) 9/6/1783, pp. 962–76

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Brimnes, *European Authority and Caste Disputes*, chapter 9

¹⁰⁶ Ramaswamy, *Textiles and Weavers*, p. 105; Chicherov, *India, Economic Development*, pp.

Indeed, collective withdrawal seems to have been 'the ultimate resource against oppression' of plebeian groups as well as of merchants and *kaniyatchukkarars* in their conflicts with political authorities. Yet, it ought to be asked why this was so. Why didn't urban labourers simply go on strike? Strike was actually not an unknown technique of social conflict and was also applied in some cases—one incident has already been mentioned above. On the whole, however, strike was a less efficient method of protest under the given circumstances. Coercion was regularly employed to enforce discipline and obedience on plebeians. For example, it was widely accepted among European merchants and officials in Madras that the business of lading and landing goods could only be kept up when the Master Attendant had the competence to inflict corporal punishment on the boatmen whenever he considered it necessary.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, in at least five reported cases the Fort St. George Council set Sepoys after boatmen who had 'deserted'.¹⁰⁸ This was not an European innovation: one of the services expected from a countryside poligar consisted in 'prevent[ing] the Husbandmen from quitting the Villages themselves,* or from driving away their working cattle, and from carrying away their Instruments of Husbandry'.¹⁰⁹ Corvée labour was practised and described with the term '*al-amari*' long before colonial powers employed forced labour for their ends.¹¹⁰ Therefore, protest could be organised and continued with less difficulty outside the area in which the employer/master either possessed coercive power himself or could mobilise it. Collective withdrawal was thus a technique of social protest well-adapted to the political and social conditions.

Yet, the Company source quoted above does not merely suggest that collective withdrawal was *practicable*, but that it was the *ultimate resource* against oppression. This is quite remarkable since more intense techniques of social conflict were not only available but their implementation was also far from unthinkable. Violence as a political means was not only used by political powers but, in some cases, by plebeians too, for example, to secure internal discipline when collective withdrawal was organised.¹¹¹ Besides, local power vacuums occurred frequently in this period of almost permanent warfare. Most importantly, the militarisation of society trained (as we saw above) even members of subordinated social groups mentally and technically in the use of arms and surely made weapons more available too. Why, then, was the use of violent means in social conflicts not more frequent and intense

¹⁰⁷ OIOC, MPP (P/241/70) 24/2/1797, pp. 581–83, OIOC, MPP (P/241/73) 22/6/1797, pp. 2082–83; *ibid.*, 24/6/1797, pp. 2113–14

¹⁰⁸ OIOC, MPP (P/240/59) 7/12/1784, pp. 1229–31

¹⁰⁹ OIOC, Madras Revenue Proceedings (P/274/17A) 12/7/1775, p. 237 (report on Trivendaporum).

¹¹⁰ For medieval evidence see Karashima, *Towards a New Formation*, pp. 211–12, 229. For the eighteenth century cf. *Papiers on Mistras*, pp. 311–13, 325–26

¹¹¹ For example, during a conflict concerning municipal taxes '... these people have not scrupled to use Acts of violence and cruelty in order to compel the rest to follow their example and leave the Town destitute ...' OIOC, MPP (P/240/65) 23/11/1786, p. 2308. There is also evidence for violence between competing factions of boat owners in Madras, OIOC, MPP (P/240/55) 3/12/1782, p. 1332. An extraordinary assault by weavers on Company soldiers and servants is mentioned in Arasaratnam, *Maritime Commerce and English Power*, p. 62.

than the sources suggest? One answer to this question (notwithstanding other, 'cultural' factors to be investigated in detail) could be that increased spatial and social mobility created not only improved conditions for the enforcement of demands against political powers but also practicable alternatives if protests did not meet with success. Before taking recourse to the really ultimate but also dangerous means of collective violence against the adversary, there was always another feasible option. Flight as protest could be turned into permanent emigration. As a mode of social behaviour, collective withdrawal had *two aspects*: it served to express social contradictions and permitted to avoid an escalation of these contradictions at the same time. Its *integrative aspect* was supported by long-term client/patron relationships between communities involving mutual 'moral' obligations. It was also backed up by the region's political culture in which, as Niels Brimnes has argued, collective withdrawal usually was not applied to overthrow the local ruler but to induce the 'little king' to fulfil his 'duties', namely to endow his subjects with privileges.¹¹² Its *disintegrative aspect* was based on long-term processes of monetisation and commercialisation which bore the *tendency* to transform and corrode corporate social and political relationships. Most importantly (for this discussion), master/servant relations were transformed in a slow and contradictory process into relationships that were not based on customary bonds between or within communities but on monetary obligations between individuals (such as lender/debtor or employer/wage labourer). Evidence for this development is abundant,¹¹³ but let us here just remind ourselves of the village artisans mentioned above who had rented out their offices to retain their share of the village's produce while earning high Madras wages at the same time. Collector Lionel Place deplored the fact that the 'jajmani system' was eroded by wage labour.¹¹⁴ The transitory character of the period is thus reflected in the contradictory, integrative and simultaneously disintegrative features of its prevailing mode of popular protest.

This ambiguity is also discernible in a type of 'ritualised collective withdrawal' which was reported by Collector Lionel Place in the last decade of the eighteenth century, and again by his successor F.W. Ellis 20 years later.¹¹⁵ At the end of the Tamil month *ani* (June/July), before the cultivation of *samba* paddy began, agricultural labourers collectively left their homes and assembled outside the village boundaries. There they negotiated with the village's dominant peasants about the terms of employment during the next agricultural year, complaining about grievances real or imaginary and threatening them with a 'general desertion'. Usually, the *kaniyatchukkar*s confirmed the agricultural labourers' 'privileges' so that an agreement was achieved at last which was understood to be binding after the labourers had accepted a present of betel leaves from their masters. In many cases, Place remarked, the labourers' families had been attached to those of the *kaniyat-*

¹¹² Brimnes, *European Authority and Caste Disputes*, chapters 4, 6

¹¹³ See Ahuja, *Die Erzeugung kolonialer Staatlichkeit*, chapter 5

¹¹⁴ Place, 'Report on the Jagir', 6/10/1795, § 20–21.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, and *Papers on Mirasi*, pp 336–37 ('Replies from Mr F.W. Ellis', 8/5/1816)

chikkarars for many generations and did by no means intend to leave their village. Yet, the ceremony was repeated every year. Eugene Irschick, Chitra and S.S. Sivakumar have offered divergent interpretations of this ritual—the latter two authors have recently highlighted and (in my opinion) much overstated its regulative, integrative aspect.¹¹⁶ Refraining from the attempt to discuss this phenomenon systematically, I will here confine myself to the remark that an adequate explanation of this form of ‘ritualised collective withdrawal’ seems impossible if its specific historical context, namely the high degree of social and spatial mobility until the end of the eighteenth century and the preponderance of collective withdrawal among the established forms of popular protest, is not taken into account. Ellis’s observation that the ritual was practised ‘especially in the neighbourhood of Madras’ (with its late eighteenth century abundance of jobs for absconded agricultural labourers) should not be ignored. The threat of ‘desertion’ as a ‘periodical assertion of independence’ on the part of agricultural labourers (Ellis’ characterisation of the ritual) became meaningless when the labourers had in fact no place to go where they could find a subsistence and where their masters could not rely on state support to force them back into service. Place claimed in 1795 that agricultural labourers *rarely* left their masters but elsewhere, in fact, he identified village–town migration as a major problem.¹¹⁷ After 20 years of colonial consolidation Ellis asserted that agricultural labourers *never* carried their threats of desertion into execution and were highly immobile. In the course of the nineteenth century, the ‘desertion ritual’ seems to have disappeared altogether while collective withdrawal became less important as a form of popular protest. Being subjective appropriations or ideological reflections of a socio-economic tendency that permitted spatial mobility, they could outlive the social phenomenon they reflected, but only for some decades, for, under consolidated colonial rule, an era of labour scarcity came to an end in which working people’s lives had neither been necessarily fixed to a single village nor to a specific master, be it a community of *kaniyatchikkarars*, a *malistry* or merchant, a European Company or any other local ruler. Though that era had not been a ‘golden age of the Pariah’ whose sheer survival was repeatedly endangered by wars and famines, it had clearly been an age of social and spatial mobility.

¹¹⁶ Sivakumar, *Peasants and Nabobs*, pp. 31, 78, see also pp. 14, 20, 70–71, 83. Irschick, *Dialogue and History*, pp. 77–78, 184–85.

¹¹⁷ Place, ‘Report on the Jagir’, 6/10/1795, § 22.

Trading activities of Indians in East Africa (with special reference to slavery) in the nineteenth century

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Enslavement of Africans was one of the most important economic activities in Africa. This bane was not as great on the east coast as compared with the west coast. Yet it entailed so much suffering and deprivation that it has attracted scholarly interest. Its studies can broadly be divided into three categories: books which cover the process of enslavement and its effect; those which concentrate on the abolition of slavery; and, books dealing with African slaves in India.

These books make but a passing reference to the role of Indians in East African slavery. But information on this subject can be collected from the accounts left by the explorers, missionaries, etc. The greatest explorer was, of course, David Livingstone (1813–73). When no news regarding him arrived for over two years, H.M. Stanley (1841–1904) went in search of him, and found him. J.H. Speke (1827–64) was the first European to reach Lake Victoria and correctly named it as the source of the Nile. Richard F. Burton (1821–90) discovered Lake Tanganyika. These and other explorers could not have any interest in distorting facts. Some persons connected with the government provide additional information. They include C.P. Rigby (British Consul), Bartle Frere (British representative), Frederick Holmwood and J.F. Elton (both British Vice-Consuls). On the whole, then, the accounts of Indian participation in East African slave trade by them are likely to be reliable. Their records, and other sources, have been used in this article to study the commercial activities of Indians in East Africa.

Indians have emigrated to the east coast of Africa for centuries, the movement having increased greatly in the nineteenth century. Their population was 5,000–

6,000 around 1850 in Zanzibar and was increasing.¹ The term *Banian* was generally used to connote all Indians; sometimes it was used in a narrower sense to mean Hindus, to the exclusion of Muslims. In Zanzibar, Hindus generally came from Kutch and Jamnagar, and Muslims from Kutch, Surat and Mumbai. Charles New, one of the first explorers to reach Mt. Kilimanjaro, describes the typical Hindu *banian* thus. 'He is a wonderfully sharp, shrewd, clever fellow, ever keeping an eye open for the main chance, and grasping at it wherever he sees, or fancies he sees it . . . See him at his books, and you see a man lost to all the world. Tailor fashion he sits upon his low couch—a mattress spread upon the ground—and surrounded by a row of cash and other boxes . . . a paper in one hand and reed pen in the other . . .'² H.M. Stanley drew a similar picture: 'The Banyan is a born trader, the beau-ideal of a sharp money-making man. Money flows into his pockets as naturally as water down a steep . . . He excels a Jew, . . . an Arab is a babe to him. It is worth money to see him labour with all his energy, soul and body, to get advantage by the smallest fraction of a coin over a native [African]'.³ Others described that *banians* formed a closely-knit society with great trust in one another. They drew bills on one another in the course of business, irrespective of the time and distance involved.⁴ However, they did not bring their families from India and always looked forward to return there.

Unlike Hindus, the Indian Muslims, who were chiefly Khojas and Bohras, brought their wives and children, and they became permanent settlers in East Africa. They too were adept in business. C.P. Rigby calls them '... a very thrifty, industrious people'.⁵ New says, 'The Borahs are a somewhat respectable class of men; in business ability a match for the banians. They are keen, sagacious, but over-grasping. Their object is to make money, and to make it as fast as they can.'⁶

Emergence of the Indian Factor

There were many reasons for the Indians to play an important role in the economy of East Africa—among them was the personality of Sayyid Sa'id, the Sultan of Muscat, Zanzibar and adjoining territories from 1806 to 1856. He was one of the ablest and most liberal rulers which Arabia has produced. He believed in free trade. Although he restricted the export of ivory and gum-copal under any flag except his own, he claimed no other monopoly. Besides, one of his first moves

¹ C P Rigby, 'Report on the Zanzibar Dominions', in *Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government* (hereafter *SRBG*), No 59, new series, Bombay, 1861, p 4.

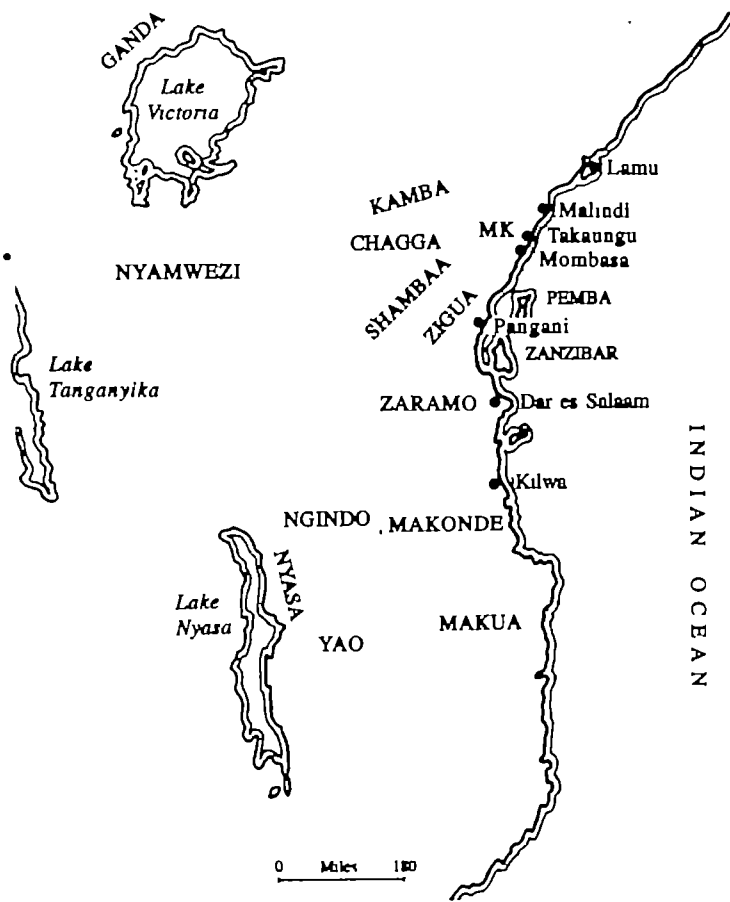
² Charles New, *Life, Wanderings, and Labour in Eastern Africa with an Account of the First Successful Ascent of the Snow Mountain, Kilima Njaro and Remarks Upon East African Slavery*, London, 1971, pp 37–38.

³ H M Stanley, *How I Found Livingstone. Travels, Adventures and Discoveries in Central Africa Including an Account of Four Months' Residence with Dr. Livingstone*, New York, 1872, p 6.

⁴ D C Devoreux, *A Cruise in the 'Gorgon'*, London, 1968, p 101. Also see Edward Hutchinson, *The Slave Trade of East Africa*, London, 1874, p 52.

⁵ Rigby, 'Report on Zanzibar Dominions', p 5.

⁶ New, *Life, Wanderings, and Labour in Eastern Africa*, p 52.



MK = Mijikenda

was to put an end to the multiplicity and irregularity of the port dues. A flat 5 per cent import duty on all goods (except bullion) was levied.⁷ This paved the way for the Indians to get actively involved in foreign trade. They were further encouraged by the social and religious freedom which the Sultan extended to them. They were allowed a temple of their own, and could celebrate their festivals. The Sultan was interested in economic prosperity for which capital and expert organisation of finance were vital. According to him, the Indians alone could meet this requirement.⁸

The Sultan introduced the cultivation of cloves in Zanzibar in 1818. There were no returns on investment in the initial years and the Arab planters came to depend increasingly on the Indians to finance their operations.

The growth of the slave trade also helped the Indians to expand their activities. The slave raids of the Arabs were confined to the coastal districts of Africa in the beginning of the nineteenth century. This resulted in the depletion of population there and hence the raids had to be carried out in the interior. The Indians who had been in Zanzibar for years told Rigby that they remembered that when they first came to the coast the whole area was densely populated, but by the 1860s it was necessary to go about eighteen days' journey inland before finding a village. The slave trade had spread so much into the heart of Africa that the slaves were brought even from the western side of Lake Nyassa. Rigby also found that the M'Do tribe, which some years back furnished most slaves for Zanzibar, was nearly extinct, and the Mizan tribe, which produced cotton over large areas, was also heading towards extinction.⁹ Livingstone wrote that the slave trade had depopulated the Lower Zambesi lands.¹⁰ When the Arabs went further (inland) in search of slaves, their dependence on the Indian capital increased.

The coming of the European explorers brought new business to the Indians. Referring to Richard F. Burton, Kenneth Ingham writes: 'The list of provisions and equipment which Burton (the traveller) took with him is a remarkable evidence of the immense preparations which preceded an expedition of this sort'. Camp furniture, instruments and several items of common use had to be carried. He continues: 'Clothing, bedding and shoes were also selected with care and provisions ranged from a box of cigars to various spices In addition there were the loads of goods, particularly of cloth, to be given in exchange for food and hospitality on the journey'.¹¹ H.M. Stanley's team consisted of 224 persons. They carried, inter alia, 72 bales of cotton, 36 bags of beads, four manloads of wire, 14 boxes of

⁷ R. Coupland, *East Africa and its Invaders from the Earliest Times to the Death of Seyyid Said in 1856*, Oxford, 1956, p. 303

⁸ A C Unomah and J B Webster, 'East Africa: The Expansion of Commerce', in John E. Flint, ed., *The Cambridge History of Africa*, Vol. 5, *From c. 1790 to c. 1870*, Cambridge, 1976, pp. 274-75.

⁹ C.E.B. Russell, ed., *General Rigby, Zanzibar and the Slave Trade with Journals, Despatches, etc.*, London, 1935, pp. 128-29

¹⁰ Letter dated 7 February 1860 from Livingstone to John Russell in J.P.R. Wallis, ed., *The Zambesi Expedition of David Livingstone*, London, 1956, p. 345.

¹¹ Kenneth Ingham, *A History of East Africa*, London, 1966, p. 93

assorted stores, one load of cooking utensils, 12 loads of boats, etc.¹² An Indian named Ladha Damha supplied beads, cloths and brass wire to J.H. Speke, as well as 100 porters.¹³

European exploration of Africa helped the Indians in another way too. New trade routes were discovered. The main trade route was from Bagamoyo to Tabora. A second route connected Kilwa with the Lake Nyassa region. A third route ran from Tanga to Victoria Nyanza. True, some sections of these routes were used even before Sultan Sa'id's time. After 1840, they extended farther inland and carried many more, and larger, caravans than earlier. Moreover, new trading settlements were also founded.¹⁴ Interestingly enough, by the 1850s Tabora had become so important a trading centre that the Indian financiers sent an agent there to represent their interests.¹⁵

The Indians do not seem to have stayed for long periods in East Africa till about 1800. After this year, their residence was for months and years. Most of the retail trade passed into their hands. In Mombasa, the road leading half-way through the centre of the town towards the fort was lined on either side with their shops.¹⁶ In Zanzibar town, nearly all the shopkeepers were Indians.¹⁷ Indian shops could be seen in other cities too. The Indians not only kept the essential provisions, but sold them on credit. So, the Africans flocked to the shop of an Indian. In Zanzibar, for example, every evening some 70 to 80 persons '... besiege him (an Indian) with cries of grain, butter or a little oil'.¹⁸ Apart from the major urban centres, the Indians had gradually moved to other places as well. For example, the German missionary Krapf had met a friendly *banian* in Pangani, a coastal town in present north-east Tanzania.

The Indians were engaged in foreign trade also. So great was their dominance in the commercial sphere that much of the trade terminology was derived from Indian languages. The months of December, January and February were called 'Mausim' (Indian trading season) and the Arab merchants went coastwards to buy the cloth, beads, wires, etc., imported by the Indian merchants primarily from Kutch, Surat and Mumbai. In the beginning, the Africans were satisfied with *kaniki*, a coarse cloth imported from Kutch. Gradually, this gave way to *merkani* which was imported from Abyssinia and Mozambique. But some cloth continued to be imported from India. They purchased beads from the Indian merchants because beads were used to make ornaments; in fact, the bead trade of Zanzibar was almost entirely in their hands.

¹² R. Stanley and Alan Neame, eds, *The Exploration Diaries of H.M. Stanley*, London, 1961, p. 25.

¹³ J.H. Speke, *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile*, Edinburgh/London, 1863, pp. 11 and 14.

¹⁴ Coupland, *East Africa and its Invaders*, p. 305.

¹⁵ Unonah and Webster, 'East Africa. The Expansion of Commerce', p. 277.

¹⁶ New, *Life, Wanderings, and Labour in Eastern Africa*, p. 52.

¹⁷ Rigby, 'Report on the Zanzibar Dominions', p. 337.

¹⁸ Richard F. Burton, *Zanzibar: City, Island, and Coast*, Vol. 2, London, 1872, p. 147.

The Indian merchants exported ivory and other African merchandise to India. Large tusks were called *babu ulaya* because they were exported to Ulaya (Europe) to make billiard balls and piano keys. The smaller tusks were known as *babu katchi* since they were exported mainly to Kutch to make ornaments. So great was the stake of the Indians in the African ivory trade that, headed by Ladha Damha, they showed '... from first to last, extreme unwillingness to open up the rich regions of copal and ivory to European eyes'.¹⁹

The export of slaves was a lucrative business. Some Indians and Arabs exported African slaves to India. The African demand for Indian textiles developed a close link between the Indian traders and the African slave traders. This demand for Indian cloth fell after 1800, but it still continued for some decades. The flow of African slaves took place for two reasons. First, there was an age-old tradition among the Indian ruling classes of keeping African, particularly Abyssinian, slaves. Second, the Indians brought them to the country along with them. For example, in 1842 a boat imported 18 slaves from Muscat to Karachi. Four of them belonged to a Muscat-based *banian* named Kookell.²⁰ But the number of slaves exported to India was much smaller than slave traffic to the West Indies and America. As R.N. Colomb, a British naval officer, says: 'I cannot, however, suppose that Bombay, or India anywhere ... could ever have been a large importer of African slaves. India is a large exporter of labour, and I have always understood that the free Indian was a cheaper article than the negro slave.'²¹ African slaves were landed in Kutch, Kathiawar, Sind, Goa, Daman, Diu, Mumbai and other places.²²

The import of slaves was banned by the Government of Bombay in 1805. Thereafter, slaves could be brought only by guile. Some boats carried only six or seven slaves as crew or wives of crew. On arrival in Mumbai, slaves were sometimes passed through the guards as brides of sailors and passengers. At times women were dressed as men. The local agent of the British at Muscat reported that 400 to 500 slaves from Zanzibar entered India annually.²³ Capt. Hennell wrote: 'As a large portion of the crew of native boats is frequently composed of Negroes, it must of course be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for any examining officer

¹⁹ Richard F. Burton, *The Lake Regions of Central Africa. A Picture of Explorations*, Vol. 1, London, undated, p. 67.

²⁰ D.R. Banaji, *Slavery in British India*, Bombay, 1933, p. 75.

²¹ R.N. Colomb, *Slave-catching in the Indian Ocean. A Record of Naval Experiences*, London, 1873, p. 100.

²² Vijaya V. Gupchup, *The Social Life of Bombay in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century, 1813-1857 (Social Changes that occurred during this Period)*, Ph.D. thesis, Department of History, Bombay University, 1990, p. 487, and Jeanette Pinto, *Slavery in Portuguese India, 1510-1852*, Ph.D. thesis, Department of History, Bombay University, 1985, pp. 45, 58.

²³ C.S. Nicholls, *The Swahili Coast Politics, Diplomacy and Trade on the East African Littoral, 1798-1856*, London, 1971, p. 206. There was a slave named Bombay. He was sold at Kilwa and taken to Kutch by an Indian. Bombay picked up some Hindustani. Cf. Burton, *Zanzibar*, Vol. 2, p. 179.

to ascertain whether the Africans on board are *bona fide* seamen, or brought for sale.²⁴

In 1843, the Government of India abolished the legal status of slavery in British India. This removed the distinction between slave and free workers in the eyes of the law. It also laid down that the right of property in a slave could no longer be enforced in the courts. Hence, a slave could leave his master at will without a formal act of manumission. As a natural corollary, the institution of slavery rapidly died out.²⁵

Among other items exported to India, mention may be made of cloves, cowries and hippopotamus' teeth. The latter were principally used for making sword hilts and knife handles.

On the whole, Indians were actively involved in foreign trade. It has been estimated that in the case of Zanzibar, the commercial capital of East Africa, approximately 80 per cent of the foreign trade passed through their hands in the mid-nineteenth century.²⁶ One reason why Indians were able to achieve such eminence was that they had organised a system of private intelligence by which '... every great Indian trader seems to hear of everything which concerns him wherever it may happen.'²⁷

Indians were involved in the foreign trade of East Africa in another sense also. They were prominent middlemen on the coast, and bought and sold different goods. The American, French and German merchants conducted nearly all their business through them.²⁸ Indians purchased the cargoes which they brought in their ships for distribution in the hinterland. Likewise, Indians bought the merchandise which the caravans brought from the inland for passing it on to the European merchants.

Moneylending was one of the most important activities of the Indians. Their clients were both Africans and Arabs. Several Arabs were reckless borrowers who did not pay heed to their repaying capacity.²⁹ Almost all the Arab traders borrowed working capital from the Indians. On one occasion, as many as 20 Indians made loans to Tippu Tip who was a merchant prince of Africa and also one of the last great slavers.³⁰ The Sultans of Zanzibar also borrowed from them. Indians loaned bales of cloth which were bartered for slaves in the interior.³¹ Slaves

²⁴ *Slave Trade Papers Relative to the Measures Adopted by the British Government, Between the Years 1820 and 1844, for Effecting the Suppression of the Slave Trade in the Persian Gulf Prepared by Lieutenant A B Kemball, Resident in the Persian Gulf, etc*, SRBG, No 24, new series, Bombay, 1956, p. 651

²⁵ Banaji, *Slavery in British India*, p. 403

²⁶ Burton, *Zanzibar*, Vol 1, p. 316.

²⁷ Hutchinson, *Slave Trade of East Africa*, p. 52.

²⁸ Russell, *General Rigby, Zanzibar and the Slave Trade*, p. 103.

²⁹ Thomas Botelet, *Narrative of a Voyage of Discovery to Africa and Arabia Performed by His Majesty's Ships Leven and Barracouta, from 1821 to 1826, Under the Command of Capt FW Owen, R.N.*, Vol 2, London, 1835, p. 200

³⁰ WH Whitely, *Maisha ya Hamed bin Muhammed al Murjebi yaani Tippu Tip kwa Maneno Yake Mwenyewe Kimefasiriwa*, Nairobi, 1974, p. 19

³¹ Burton, *Zanzibar*, Vol 2, p. 407.

sometimes borrowed from Indians.³² Indians were willing to give loans to the slaves because the latter also owned property. Many slaves owned, for example, slave-boys and slave-girls to cook food for them and attend to them in other ways.

However, money-lending was risky and, in consequence, moneylenders charged high rates of interest. Often they were 50, 60 or 70 per cent.³³ The interest rate could be as high as cent per cent in Khartoum.³⁴

It was a common practice to pawn property when a debt was contracted. Slaves were often pawned with the Indians. If the pawned slave ran away or died, the moneylender was not required to pay for the loss. But for beating or threatening a pawned slave he was obliged to pay a fine to the slave-owner.³⁵

The Indians were the masters of customs tariff of East Africa. Customs collection in Zanzibar was first farmed out to the Indians in 1804, and the contracts were renewed periodically. The reasons for this were many. The Arabs were bad in book-keeping, and it was a common belief that they lacked integrity. As against this, the Indians were known to be financial wizards. They had the capital resources to make high bids and regular payments thereafter. They made payments to the Sultans even in advance and so the latter were obliged to renew the contracts. Moreover, the Indians were politically impartial.

The Indians were involved in some other economic activities too. For instance, they kept in their employment porters, the dividing line between the latter and the slaves being thin. The Indians hired them out to caravan leaders and others. This was a useful service as the tsetse flies killed the beasts of burden in large numbers. They also undertook the transfer of merchandise and packets to the interior of Africa.³⁶ In this sense, they were the precursors of the modern couriers. The Indians undertook the insurance of vessels. The popular method was *patan sulamat* (safety of the keel). Since the loss of the keel meant the loss of the whole ship as its framework was built on it, their clients could make no claims unless there was a total loss.³⁷

Some individual Indians left their mark on the commercial and financial spheres of whom Tharia Topan, a Muslim, was the most important. He was the richest Indian in East Africa. He came from India as a penniless young man. For some time he worked in the customs house but did not like the job. He borrowed two donkeys and a cart, and hired a servant to go to distant plantations to collect cloves. He returned with a load of them which he sold to a broker for a large profit. He realised that the greater the distance from the town, the lower the price at which

³² Frederick Cooper mentions that a slave of Juma bin Nasib borrowed 92 dollars from two Indians *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa*, New Haven, 1977, p. 234.

³³ Stanley, *How I Found Livingstone*, p. 6

³⁴ E F Berloux, *The Slave Trade in Africa in 1872 Principally Carried on for the Supply of Turkey, Egypt, Persia, and Zanzibar*, London, 1872, p. 15

³⁵ Abdulaziz Y Lodhi, *The Institution of Slavery in Zanzibar and Pemba*, Uppsala, 1973, p. 14.

³⁶ Letter dated 26 June 1871 from Livingstone to John Kirk in R. Foskett, ed., *The Zambesi Doctors David Livingstone's letters to John Kirk, 1858-1872*, Edinburgh, 1964, p. 156.

³⁷ Burton, *Zanzibar*, Vol 2, p. 407

cloves could be purchased. He made contacts with the plantation owners in the hinterland and was assured of regular supplies. He visited India and made agreements with Ismaili firms for the sale of cloves. Eventually, he established his own warehouse and waited for an advantageous price to sell. He was also a banker, and owned several ships and slaves. He had close financial relations with the Sultans of Zanzibar. He was also a financier and business friend of Tippu Tip.³⁸ Stanley writes, 'One of the honestest among men, white or black, red or yellow, is . . . Taria Topan. Among the Europeans at Zanzibar, he has become a proverb for honesty, and strict business integrity.'³⁹ He died in 1891.

Topan had an agent in Bagamoyo whose name was Jan Muhammed Hansraj (sic). In course of time he acquired great wealth and attained a high position in Zanzibar.⁴⁰ Again Ratan Bhimji gained a reputation as the 'Ivory King of Zanzibar'. Purushottam Thakersey was a Bhatia. A merchant by profession, he was greatly respected by European and Africans alike.⁴¹ Jairam Sewji was the customs master of Zanzibar and won contracts in 1840s. He had extensive business interests in Zanzibar and the East African mainland on the one hand, and Mumbai and Kutch, on the other.⁴² The most successful Indian businessman in Malindi was a Bohra named Jivanji Mamuji. He left India for Mombasa as an adult and then went to Malindi. He opened a store in a part of the town which later became known as Kwa Jivanji (place of Jivanji). He bought maize, millet and sesame from the local planters, and sent them to Mombasa, Zanzibar and Arabia. He brought goods from Mombasa to Malindi to sell in his store.⁴³

A reference may be made here to Sayyam and Musa (called Musa Muzuri or Handsome Moses). Driven by poverty, they came to East Africa from Surat around 1820. These two Khoja brothers appear to be the first non-Africans to penetrate as far as Unyamwezi (in western Tanzania) in 1825 when the Arabs had not advanced beyond the fringes of Unyamwezi. The governor of Zanzibar supported the venture and equipped them. The expedition was successful and a large quantity of ivory was collected. Sayyam died while returning to the coast and Musa inherited the entire fortune. He settled at Unanyembe. He led several caravans into the interior in the following years. He became one of the most successful traders in the region south of Lake Victoria. Burton writes: 'He is the recognized Doyen of the commercial body, and he acts as agent and warehouseman; his hall is usually full of buyers and sellers, Arab and African, and large investments of wires, beads, and

³⁸ Whitely, *Tippu Tip*, p. 57, Heinrich Brode, *Tippoo Tib: The Story of His Career in Central Africa Narrated from his Own Accounts*, London, 1907, pp. 130 and 159; and Leda Farrant, *Tippu Tip and the East African Slave Trade*, London, 1975, pp. 50 and 75.

³⁹ Stanley, *How I Found Livingstone*, pp. 8-9.

⁴⁰ Brode, *Tippoo Tib*, p. 156.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁴² John Gray, *History of Zanzibar from the Middle Ages to 1856*, London, 1962, p. 144.

⁴³ Cooper, *Plantation Slavery*, p. 94.

cotton cloths, some of them valuable, are regularly forwarded to him with comforts and luxuries from the coast.⁴⁴

An Indian woman named Gonera also made a name for herself. She was a widow and lived near Bagamoyo. She exported cloth, beads and wire into the interior and imported ivory from there. On two sides of her house *matama*, the staple grain of East Africa, was cultivated and on the third side Indian corn and *muhogo*, a yam-like root of whitish colour, which was also called *monloc*.⁴⁵

We may account for these success stories. Apart from the favourable circumstances mentioned above, there were other factors at work. Hard work and perseverance played an important role. Business acumen was another reason. In Kaole, for example, '... the crafty Hindu buys for eighteen to twenty dollars an article worth, at Zanzibar, fifty. If the barbarian be so unwise as to prefer cash, being intellectually unfit to discriminate between a cent and a dollar, he loses even more ...'⁴⁶ Some traders of Zanzibar supplied beads of such a poor quality that they had to be simply thrown away.⁴⁷ Stanley went to the extent of claiming that the Indian muslims could produce '... scores of unconscionable rascals'.⁴⁸

Indian Connection With Enslavement

The East African slave trade was mainly in the hands of coastal and Zanzibari Arabs. From the coastal districts they went to the interior of the continent. They carried with them cloth, beads, etc., to barter for slaves, as also ammunition.

The Arab slavers mainly adopted two methods to enslave the Africans. First, they raided the villages and enslaved the residents. Second, they encouraged the tribal chiefs to enslave fellow Africans whom they bartered for their merchandise. The first batch of slaves collected was taken from one place to another and the number of slaves increased. When the slave caravan was large enough, it was taken to the coastal depots of Kilwa, Lindi and Bagamoyo and from there to Zanzibar in dhows. At the Sultan's customs house, a tax was paid per head. Thereafter, they were taken to the slave market. These slaves were purchased by the local Arabs and other residents. It was reported in 1841 that almost every subject of the Sultan owned slaves, the poorer about five and the wealthier up to 1,500.⁴⁹ They were also exported to the Middle East and India.⁵⁰

The process of enslavement entailed heavy mortality. When the Arabs raided an African village, many residents died defending their homes and families. Those

⁴⁴ Burton, *Lake Regions of Central Africa*, Vol 2, pp 223-25. Also see Ingham, *History of East Africa*, pp 57-58

⁴⁵ Stanley, *How I Found Livingstone*, p 75

⁴⁶ Burton, *Lake Regions of Central Africa*, Vol 1, p 18

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, Vol 2, p 390.

⁴⁸ Stanley, *How I Found Livingstone*, p 8.

⁴⁹ Nicholls, *The Swahili Coast*, p. 204

⁵⁰ Christopher Lloyd, *The Navy and the Slave Trade: The Suppression of the African Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century*, London, 1949, p. 189.

who escaped enslavement faced the prospect of famines, which often followed the raids. Many slaves died in the course of the overland marches owing to hunger, thirst and disease. When transported in dhows in Zanzibar and beyond, many more died due to inadequate supply of provisions and overcrowding. Livingstone estimated that for one man carried away, at least five men were left dead and in some instances for one slave who arrived at his destination, ten others lost their lives.⁵¹

The Indians shared the guilt and also the profits of slavery with the Arabs. Livingstone refers to '... the slaving field of the Banians and Arabs in Central Africa'.⁵² The slaves sent by the Indians tried hard to induce Livingstone not to explore Africa. They even falsely told him that the British consul in Zanzibar did not want him to continue the journey. They had been apparently instructed by their Indian masters to confuse him lest he should travel and expose their activities. Their headmen were Sheriff and Awathe. One of them even attempted to kill Livingstone. The plot failed because one of his men overheard it.⁵³ Livingstone often complained that the slaves were utterly unsuitable for his work. He also spoke of '... a slave trading ring or coterie ...' hindering his travels. This conspiracy was not just of Arab origin but involved Indians '... who were the chief financiers of Arab commercial ventures in the interior'.⁵⁴

Livingstone continued his explorations despite the machinations of the Indians. Their worst fears proved correct when he exposed the evils of slavery and pleaded for its suppression. In one of his last letters he denounced the Indians and regretted that '... by their arms ammunition and goods a large and cruel slave trade has been carried on—they would not hurt a flea or murder a louse but they are virtually the worst cannibals in all Africa ...'.⁵⁵

The process of enslavement has already been described. How were the Indians involved in it? Joseph E. Harris wrote, in 1971: 'There is no available evidence, however, that Indians actually organised and led slave caravans in the interior'.⁵⁶ But one instance of an Indian organising and leading a slave caravan is on record. Lalji, the Customs Master at Pangani, advanced merchandise to Mamji Hadji for the raid on the condition that the slaves should be sold in consultation with him. Afterwards, Hadji told J.F. Elton that '... he had been away two years, did not know exactly how many slaves he had, more than 1,000 certainly; was obliged to march slowly, as some had been a year-and-a-half in the gangs'.⁵⁷

⁵¹ Berlioux, *Slave Trade in Africa*, p. 56

⁵² W.G. Blaikie, *Personal Life of David Livingstone*, London, 1925, p. 373

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 343

⁵⁴ M.E. Page, 'David Livingstone, the Arabs and the Slave Trade', in Bridgial Pachai, ed., *Livingstone. Man of Africa, Memorial Essays, 1873-1973*, London, 1973, p. 144

⁵⁵ Letter dated 21 November 1872 from Livingstone to Dr. L. Marsh in Zoe Marsh, ed., *East Africa Through Contemporary Records*, Cambridge, 1961, p. 44.

⁵⁶ Joseph E. Harris, *The African Presence in Asia*, Evanston, 1971, p. 12

⁵⁷ J.F. Elton, *Travels and Researches Among the Lakes and Mountains of Eastern and Central Africa*, London, 1968, pp. 92-93

The Arabs operated with the material and financial backing of the Indians. The Arabian coast did not produce timber beyond the bare minimum essential for fishing boat requirements. The timber for other vessels came from Mumbai. The Indian merchants supplied cloth, beads, wire, etc., to the Arabs for bartering against the slaves. Edward Hutchinson says that the capital was 'largely furnished' by them.⁵⁸ As already seen, Tharia Topan was the banker of Tippu Tip. An Arab borrowed merchandise worth, say, 5,000 dollars from an Indian to be conveyed into the hinterland. The greater the distance covered, the greater the appreciation in the value of merchandise. But the prices of slaves correspondingly declined. A slave costing about 30 dollars in Zanzibar cost about one-fourth of that amount in the interior.⁵⁹ Thus, the slavers earned handsome profits. They repaid the principal with interest to the Indians.

Sometimes the return of the caravans was delayed. It was not always possible for the slavers to take the shortest route. Tribal wars and famines induced them to make a detour as did, in later years, the need to avoid European explorers and Christian missionaries. When the return of a caravan became overdue, the anxiety of the Indian creditors also grew. On many occasions the caravans did not return. Once the caravan of a trader of Mombasa was completely annihilated by the Masai tribe owing to a trivial dispute.⁶⁰ Many a time, when the caravan leaders failed to make successful trips, they just absconded because they dared not face their creditors.

The Indians also offered the services of their porters for the transport of merchandise. One such Indian was Sur Haji Palloo. He was said to be '... the best man in Bagamoyo to procure a supply of pagazis'.⁶¹

Among the Indian customs masters, Jairam Sewji was of a particularly humane disposition. He '... frequently furnishes (the slaves) with a meal of uncooked broom corn, which the famished wretches bolt with the eagerness of horses'.⁶²

The slaves auctioned in Zanzibar for export were further moved out in dhows which carried 100 to 400 of them. These dhows were simple but swift, and in a good breeze outdistanced all but the fastest European sailing vessels. They were owned by Indians and Omani Arabs.⁶³

⁵⁸ Devereux, *Cruise in Gorgon*, p. 13. Frederick Holmwood, British Vice-Consul at Zanzibar, also wrote that 'frequently' the Arabs were 'trading with capital borrowed from one of the numerous Indian merchants from Kutch or Bombay', in Elton, *Travels and Researches Among the Lakes and Mountains*, p. 5.

⁵⁹ Stanley, *How I Found Livingstone*, p. 8.

⁶⁰ Joseph Thomson, *Through Masai Land: A Journey of Exploration Among the Snowclad Volcanic Mountains and Strange Tribes of Eastern Equatorial Africa, Being a Narrative of the Royal Geographical Society's Expedition to Mount Kenya and Lake Victoria Nyanza, 1883-1884*, London, 1968, pp. 161-62.

⁶¹ Stanley, *How I Found Livingstone*, p. 50.

⁶² W. Osgood quoted by C. T. Brady, *Commerce and Conquest in East Africa with Particular Reference to the Salem Trade with Zanzibar*, Salem, 1950, p. 148.

⁶³ R. F. Morton, *Slaves, Fugitives and Freedmen on the Kenya Coast, 1873-1907*, Abstract of dissertation submitted to Syracuse University, 1976, pp. 8-9.

It was a normal practice among the Indians to keep slaves. In 1843, Jairam Sewji owned about 200 slaves.⁶⁴ Kanu's slaves were mostly children.⁶⁵ Many Indians came alone to East Africa. So they kept slave-girls as concubines. The possession of slaves was a matter of prestige and it was a disgrace to sell domestic slaves. Young boys were in demand because eunuchs were required to supervise slave-girls and to work in the harem. The Indians needed slaves for their business operations, especially the movement of their caravans. They lent their slaves to the caravan leaders and European explorers. They allowed the slaves to sell their labour and make extra earnings for themselves.⁶⁶

The slave market was the obvious source of slaves but Indians also secured them directly from the traders and raiders who borrowed money and goods from them.

When the Indians lent money, slaves were pawned with them for not more than one month. If the slave-owner could not settle the account within this period, he had to make a fresh pledge. Pawned slaves had to work for the moneylender. If he was not satisfied with them, he could send them back and demand his money.

If the pawned slaves were not redeemed, the moneylender became their owner. Some slaves of Ramji called themselves *muinyi* (master), the title of African freemen, for Ramji had received them in pawn from their parents and uncles who failed to redeem them.⁶⁷

The treatment of slaves by the Indians differed from person to person. It ranged from harsh to kind. Following the common Muslim practice, it is likely that the Indian Muslims also castrated young boys. Elton saw two slaves who were deserted and left to starve in Dar-es-Salam by their Indian master who left for Kutch.⁶⁸

As against this, some Indians treated them as their own children.⁶⁹ When slave-girls were kept as concubines, they treated their children as their own legitimate offspring. Musa Mzuri deeply loved his son Abdulla though he was born of a slave-girl. But there were also Indians who did not accept their illegitimate offspring by the slave-girls, and even resorted to infanticide.

On the whole, the Indians treated their slaves well. This is proved by the fact that in 1873, of the 1,408 slaves freed by British Vice-Consul Elton, 920 slaves preferred to remain with their masters. But then, the Indians might be making a virtue of necessity. Harsh treatment of slaves could result in desertions. Besides, as Burton writes: 'The serviles of Zanzibar have played their Arab masters some

⁶⁴ Nicholls, *The Swahili Coast*, p. 204. By 1860 Indians owned several slaves and Jairam Sewji was the largest slave-owner with 460 slaves. See Paul E. Loveday, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, Cambridge/London, 1983, p. 224.

⁶⁵ C.E.B. Russell, ed., *General Righty, Zanzibar and the Slave Trade*, p. 142.

⁶⁶ J.H. Speke, *What Led to the Discovery of the Source of the Nile*, Edinburgh/London, 1864, p. 194.

⁶⁷ Burton, *Zanzibar*, Vol. 1, p. 140.

⁶⁸ Elton, *Travels and Researches Among the Lakes and Mountains*, p. 73.

⁶⁹ For example, Ramji called his slaves his sons. See Burton, *Lake Regions of Central Africa*, Vol. 1, p. 20.

notable tricks. Many a severe lord has perished by the hand of a slave. Several have lost their eyes by the dagger's point during sleep.'⁷⁰

End of Slavery

Britain initiated moves to suppress the slave trade. As early as 1812, the Government of Bombay, through whom dealings were done with the Arabs, requested Sayyid Sa'id to stop it. In 1822, the first of a series of treaties between him and Britain was made to the effect. It banned export of slaves by the Sultan's subjects. In 1839, the Sultan gave the right to search Omani dhows to the British navy. But many dhows escaped the latter. The treaty of 1845 banned the shipment of slaves outside the African dominions of the Sultan, but trafficking in slaves continued. It was done stealthily. Sometimes the Africans themselves refused to admit that they were slaves. By the treaty of 1873 between Sultan Bargash (1870-88) and the British, all shipment of slaves by sea was abolished. The treaty of 1876 went one step ahead and banned all slave caravans on land.⁷¹

All this naturally affected the Indian connection with slavery. The first severe blow came to the Indian slave-owners in 1850 when the captain of *Castor*, at the instance of Political Agent Atkins Hamerton, destroyed the barracoons near Kilwa where the slaves were kept and imprisoned by the owners.

Hamerton's successor C.P. Rigby reached Zanzibar in 1858. He forbade Indians, who were British subjects, to keep slaves as slavery had already been abolished by the government of India. In 1859 he confined in irons a shopkeeper for buying a slave-boy. This was the first occasion when a person was punished in Zanzibar for trafficking in slaves. After some weeks he learnt that an Indian had purchased a slave-girl. He sent her to the kazi for manumission and imprisoned the owner.⁷²

Rigby notified that he would '... inflict a fine to the amount of £ 100 upon any British subject holding or buying or selling African slaves for each and every one of such slaves'. He gave a month's time to the slave-owners to bring their slaves to the consulate for manumission.

The notice caused great commotion among the Indians. The month passed and not a single slave-owner turned up. At the end of it Rigby summoned one of the wealthiest Hindu merchants who owned over 400 slaves. Rigby fined him £ 100. But the Indian refused to pay saying that the slaves were his property, purchased with his money and Rigby had no authority to deprive him of them. Rigby sent for a black-smith, ordered a heavy pair of iron chains and had them fastened on the Indian's legs. The sight of one of the most influential Indians being marched through the town in irons and then imprisoned caused great excitement. All the shops were

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 374.

⁷¹ Reginald Coupland, *The British Anti-Slavery Movement*, London, 1933, chapters 7 and 8, and Peter Collister, *The Last Days of Slavery: England and the East African Slave Trade, 1870-1900*, Nairobi/Dar es Salaam, 1961.

⁷² Russell, *General Rigby, Zanzibar and Slave Trade*, p. 136.

closed on the following day. But Rigby declined to relent. Instead, he issued a proclamation that all stocks and whipping posts on estates belonging to British subjects were to be destroyed at once, and that anyone found with slave chains, irons, implements of torture or punishment and dealing with them would be punished with fine or imprisonment. These measures had effect and every day adult slaves were brought to the consulate. But children were secreted by their owners. When Rigby discovered this, he ordered that every child who came should be given a dress and 3 lbs of sweetmeats. Then the children also came to the consulate.⁷³ In all, he emancipated about 6,000 slaves of the Indians.

Sir Lewis Pelly became the acting political agent in 1862, and he was followed by R.L. Playfair in 1863. They held that the Indians could buy slaves as they placed themselves under the protection of the Sultan of Zanzibar. H.A. Churchill, who became the political agent in 1866, found that the Indians had 1,200 slaves, many of whom were purchased during the previous five years. These Indians allowed their countrymen under British protection to reap the advantages of slave labour through them. The consular court dismissed several cases against the Indians when it was asserted that the slaves belonged to a brother or uncle who was under the Sultan's protection. It soon became fruitless for slaves to complain to the consulate. This state of affairs continued till 1897 when the legal status of slavery came to an end in Zanzibar. The last known case of a slave dhow in East African waters was reported in 1899.⁷⁴ But slavery *per se* lingered on in East Africa till the early years of the twentieth century.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp 140–43

⁷⁴ *Восток, Труды Тир*, p 147.

Bubonic plague in south Bihar: Gaya and Shahabad districts, 1900–1924

Alok Sheel

New Delhi

Introduction

Bubonic plague was perhaps the most puzzling and dreaded disease in the western world till the twentieth century. This was both on account of its heavy toll—till the advent of modern sulpha drugs 70–80 per cent of those who contracted the disease died¹—and the mysterious way by which it seemed to spread. There seemed to be something supernatural about a disease that could not be contained by normal quarantine measures. Indeed, such measures seemed to aggravate the epidemic, for it did not pass directly from the diseased to those who cared for the patients.

It is somewhat chilling to note that a disease (primarily of rodents) which only incidentally effects humans, should have claimed more human victims in the course of three devastating pandemics of 541–767 A.D., 1346–1771 and 1850–1930, than all the wars ever fought. It is estimated that more than 200 million people perished in these pandemics.²

The plague spawned a horrifying folklore in Europe, some of which has been passed on in such innocuous phrases as 'God bless you', in response to a sneeze, and the cheerful nursery rhyme,

¹ Andrew B. Appleby, 'The Disappearance of the Plague: A Continuing Puzzle', *Economic History Review*, Second series, Vol. 32(2), May 1980, p. 163. In the Indian epidemic during the first two decades of the twentieth century, mortality rates were reported to be between 65 and 90 per cent of those who contracted the disease. W.E. Jennings, *A Manual of Plague*, London, 1903, p. 117. Major Clemesha, Plague Medical Officer, reporting on the outbreak of plague in the neighbouring district of Patna in 1900, found that 720 out of 733 persons who contracted the plague in Barh died within the space of three-and-a-half months. The figure for Mokameh was 987 out of 1,026; cf. *Bangal Municipal Proceedings*, 'A' Series, No. 23, October 1900.

² Nicole Duplaix, 'Fleas: The Lethal Leapers', *National Geographic*, Vol. 173, No. 5, May 1988, pp. 673–90.

Ring a ring o'roses,
A pocketful of posies,
Atishoo! Atishoo!
We all fall down.

'Ring o'roses' referred to the skin changes resulting from the bubonic form of the disease; sneezing was a symptom of the virulent pneumonic form; and the aroma of a posy of fragrant herbs was believed to prevent contagion. Falling down, of course, referred to death, which almost inevitably followed.³

It was only at the turn of the nineteenth century, during the third pandemic, that Alexandre Yersin, sent by the Institut Pasteur to investigate the disease, discovered the plague bacillus—but not how it was transmitted—while examining the buboes of a plague victim. The bacillus consequently acquired the name of both the discoverer and the institute to which he belonged.⁴

The Etiology of Plague

Plague is a bacterial disease caused by the micro-organism *Pasteurella pestis* or, as it is sometimes called, *Yersinia pestis*. Three separate strains of plague bacilli have been identified. *Pasteurella pestis antiqua* was responsible for the first great pandemic that spread through the Near East into North Africa and Europe. *Pasteurella pestis mediaevalis*, which spread to Europe during the Black Death, was the chief strain in the second great pandemic which perhaps killed 50 million people in all.⁵ The third strain *Pasteurella pestis orientalis*, with its home in south China, Burma and northern India, was responsible for the third great pandemic. This pandemic began from the Yunan province in China in 1855. It claimed six million lives in India in the decade beginning 1898, and 12 million in the three decades ending 1928.⁶

Ordinarily, an infected human can neither infect other humans nor other fleas, except in the rare pneumonic form, or when the infected flea is looking for a fresh host subsequent to the death of its current human host. Like most fleas, the rat flea prefers to feed off a single species of animals. An infected rat flea will bite humans, and thereby transmit the disease, only when an outbreak of rat plague has resulted in such high rat mortality that it has insufficient rats to feed on. This means that human plague epidemics follow rat epidemics, known as epizootics.

The plague bacillus is carried from rat to rat by the bite of the flea,⁷ of which there are more than 2,400 known species and sub-species. However, only about

³ Anne Roberts, 'Plague', *History Today*, April 1980, p. 29

⁴ Duplax, 'Fleas', p. 684

⁵ Appleby, 'The Disappearance of the Plague', p. 172, Duplax, 'Fleas', p. 677.

⁶ Duplax, *ibid*, pp. 682–85; Appleby, 'The Disappearance of the Plague'

⁷ The flea, in particular the rat flea, is a very adaptable creature, with attributes which qualify it as an effective transmitter of plague bacilli. Its mouth parts function like a combined syringe, needle and blood-culture bottle. When an infected rat is bitten, a bloody suspension of living plague bacilli

120 species/sub-species are known to transmit plague, and fewer than 20 species readily bite man. Of these, *Xenopsylla cheopsis* is the main species generally associated with the transmission of plague among human populations.⁸

Permanently settled, or enzootic, among remote colonies of burrowing rodents, plague periodically spreads erratically among them as an epizootic. Should the epizootic reach a dense population of commensal rodents living in close proximity to human populations, it may provoke human cases, as happened recently in Surat in Gujarat. While human plague epidemics invariably follow epizootics, the latter do not necessarily lead to human epidemics. The transmission of plague requires such a precise meshing of a complex chain of events that plague epidemics may be described as, at least partly fortuitous.

For plague to spread as an epidemic among human populations, not only should there be a dense population of commensal rodents in close contact with man, but also the right type of flea. This flea must bite an infected rodent and pick up the plague. The microbe incubates in the flea's digestive tract, where it multiplies and blocks the gut. If the now starving flea bites a human in a fruitless attempt to feed—and it will do so only if there has been heavy rat mortality—the blocked flea will inject countless bacilli into the blood stream, just one of which can lead to death.⁹

The human settlement pattern is of critical importance in converting an epizootic into an epidemic. It is important to note that ordinarily an infected human can neither infect other humans—except in the rare pneumonic form—nor other fleas. Plague bacilli counts in humans never reach levels statistically high enough to permit a feeding flea to suck up any of these bacilli. Rats, on the other hand, have a greater tolerance for plague bacilli, and are more thoroughly infected before the disease kills them. The higher bacillus count in the rat greatly increases the chance that a feeding flea would ingest bacteria and catch the disease.¹⁰

is drawn up into the flea's stomach, where they multiply and block the gut. The flea becomes hungry, but cannot feed until the blockage is disposed of. When a blocked flea feeds, it sinks its previous meal, now cultured into a teeming mass of living plague bacilli, into the bitten area. At the same time the flea defecates, and scratching the flea bites helps to inoculate the faecal plague bacilli

The flea can withstand enormous pressure—the secret to surviving the scratchings of the flea-bitten. It is also a star performer, a true insect olympian which can jump 150 times its own length vertically or horizontally—equivalent to a man jumping 1,000 feet—and accelerate 50 times faster than the space shuttle. It is equipped with antennae and bristles sensitive to heat, vibration and air currents, and can sense carbon dioxide exhaled by a passing host. It is thus well-equipped to find a host, and then hop aboard, a skill of crucial importance in plague epidemics, as infected fleas readily abandon dead, cooling hosts to hop on to rat or human hosts in the immediate vicinity.

Fleas can also survive months without feeding, and can remain frozen for a year and then revive. It is interesting to note that in the European epidemics, the epidemic would be dormant in winter, only to reappear the following spring, whereas in India the pattern was just the reverse, since fleas propagate rapidly in temperatures of 20–25°C and humidity of 0.03–0.3 per cent. Duplax, 'Fleas', pp. 675 and 689. J. C. Russel, 'Population in Europe', in Carlo Cipolla, ed., *The Fontana Economic History of Europe*, Vol. 1, Fontana, 1972, p. 55.

⁸ Duplax, 'Fleas', p. 685. John T. Alexander, *Bubonic Plague in Early Modern Russia: Public Health and Urban Disaster*, London, 1980, p. 2.

⁹ Duplax, 'Fleas', pp. 685–86, Alexander, *Bubonic Plague*, p. 2.

¹⁰ Appleby, 'The Disappearance of the Plague', p. 165.

Plague may take a bubonic, septicaemic or pneumonic form. The bubonic form is characterised by buboes, which are masses of tender, enlarged lymph nodes, usually in the groin, but sometimes in the armpits or the neck. They are painful until they suppurate and drain, usually one or two weeks after the onset of the illness. The patient has a high fever (102–105°F) during this period, with toxic symptoms of headache, vomiting and ataxia. He may also show a bleeding tendency, with petechiae and bruising of the skin and internal visceral bleeding, which may prove fatal.

The septicaemic form is simply an overwhelming infection. The patient dies before the buboes have a chance to develop, as the bacillus enters the blood-stream. This form of infection is ordinarily difficult to differentiate from other types of fever, such as malaria. The pneumonic form, where the bacillus enters the lungs, probably occurs in about 5 per cent of patients. Lung lesions develop and break down, so that the patient produces bloodstained sputum teeming with organisms. The patient is then a dangerous source of 'airborne droplet' infection. The proportion of deadly pneumonic cases seems to have varied in different plague epidemics, and its relation to the common bubonic type is also not clear. Though a case of pneumonic plague may infect by droplet spread, the new case is likely to revert to the bubonic form.¹¹

Source and Spread of Contagion in South Bihar

The third great plague pandemic appears to have begun in the Yunan province of China in 1855 and travelled, slowly, eastwards. By 1894 it reached Hong Kong, where it killed some 10,000 persons. As Hong Kong's death toll mounted, hundreds of ships docked and departed with their familiar complement of rats. Steamships now carried the disease even faster. Before unsuspecting crews became ill, plague had fanned to places where it had previously been unknown: Japan, Australia, southern Africa and the Americas. It was thus that plague arrived in Bombay in 1896.¹²

Serious outbreaks in the Bengal Presidency began in 1898, in Calcutta and Backergange. 'Plague Interception Camps' were set up on the borders of the Bengal Presidency to monitor and to prevent the entry of the plague bacillus from the west. An interception camp was opened at the Chausa railway station in Shahabad district on 23 December 1898.¹³ Attempts were also made to monitor maritime movements on the river Ganges.¹⁴

¹¹ Roberts, 'Plague', pp. 29–30, Jennings, *A Manual of Plague*, p. 66.

¹² Duplax, 'Fleas', p. 684. It was in Bombay that a doctor from the Institut Pasteur finally unveiled the secret that had tormented man for so long. 'Walking filthy city streets, he observed dead rats littering plague-ridden neighbours, 75 in one hose alone. Humans who picked them up, he noted, soon fell ill themselves. In his makeshift Bombay laboratory, a tent pummelled by the monsoon, Simond dissected rats and found the plague bacillus. These plague rats, he observed, carried far more fleas than healthy ones. He also noted that, contrary to common belief, the rat fleas readily bite man. Rat bacilli fleas. Simond had the connection.' *Ibid.*, p. 685.

¹³ *Bengal Municipal Proceedings*, 'A' Series, Nos 25 and 150, February 1899.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Nos 153–54, February 1899.

In the early part of 1899, plague again visited Calcutta and there were also outbreaks in 10 rural districts. The administration now turned its attention to inspection of trains leaving Calcutta for other parts of the Presidency, and also en route.¹⁵ In the cold weather of 1900–1901, the disease spread over a large area including Patna, Gaya and Shahabad.¹⁶ By 1905, plague was so rampant that the civil surgeon of Gaya could remark that 'Plague may now be considered as having become endemic'.¹⁷

Gaya district was initially more affected than Shahabad. This situation changed dramatically during the winter of 1902–1903, as plague was reported in 12 villages of Shahpur thana, nine villages in Arrah thana, and in the Dumraon and Piro thanas of Shahabad district. Arrah and Jagdishpur towns were very badly affected, and rats in the jail godown led to an outbreak in Arrah Jail. There was widespread flight from affected areas such as Dumraon and Jagdishpur. There was such panic in the latter town that 13,000 of the 14,000 inhabitants fled in the winter of 1902–1903.¹⁸ By the winter of 1904–1905 plague had spread to the Sasaram and Buxar thanas of Shahabad, Buxar town having an especially bad time in 1910–1911. In 1907–1908 there was again a very severe outbreak in Jagdishpur, within months of abandoning the rat extermination drive.

Plague revisited Gaya district after a short respite between June 1902 and November 1903. Both rural and urban areas in Gaya and Tikari were affected by the scourge, which also spread to Daudnagar. Severe outbreaks recurred almost continuously upto 1908, 1905 being perhaps the worst year on record during the entire period of this study. Gaya town was particularly badly affected in 1906–1907. By the winter of 1908 Jehanabad subdivision, particularly Arwal thana, was severely affected. Jagdishpur town in the Shahpur thana was repeatedly ravaged.¹⁹

After a relative respite between 1908 and 1910, the next upswing coincided with the Census operations in 1911. Plague was particularly severe in the towns of Gaya and Jehanabad, and also in adjoining interior areas. In the winter of 1910–1911, plague outbreaks were reported in 95 out of 7,879 villages in Gaya, and in 357 out of 5,534 villages in Shahabad.²⁰ Census operations were once again disrupted as nearly all the inhabitants of Jehanabad town camped in huts outside the town, while 30 per cent of the population of Gaya town fled to the Mufassal (Gaya rural).²¹

¹⁵ *Ibid*, Nos 49–50, May 1899

¹⁶ *Census of India*, 1901, Vol 6, Bengal, Bengal, by E A Gait, Calcutta, 1902, pp 85–87, *Bengal Municipal Proceedings*, 'A' Series, Nos 1–2, July 1902

¹⁷ *Bengal Municipal Proceedings*, 'A' Series, Nos 1–2, August 1905

¹⁸ *Ibid*, Nos 14–15, February 1903, Nos 34–35, April 1903

¹⁹ *Bengal Municipal Proceedings*, 'A' Series, Nos 1–2, August 1905, *Census of 1911*, Vol 5, pp 119–20; *Bengal Revenue Administration Reports*, 1900/01–1910/11 J.F.W. James, *Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteers. Shahabad*, by L.S.S. O'Malley, revised edition, Patna, 1924, pp 59–60

²⁰ *Bengal Municipal Proceedings*, 'A' Series, Nos 7–8, October 1905, Nos 86–87, February 1909; No 57, June 1909; Nos 6–7, June 1911

²¹ Indeed, the coincidence of plague with the census both in 1901 and 1911 led to the popular belief that there was some nexus between the two. Cf *Census of 1911*, Vol 5, p 37.

The horrifying cyclical pattern persisted into the second decade of the present century, and right up to 1923. During this period, plague was more severe in Shahabad district, particularly in the Dumraon and Buxar thanas. The epidemic peaked in 1914–1915, 1918–1919, 1921 before the departing violent burst of 1923, which chiefly affected Buxar.²²

Extraordinary meteorological disturbances seem to have facilitated the spread of plague in south Bihar, as they indeed did in Europe in 1769–1771.²³ The Indian monsoons can vary sharply in quality from year to year. The two-and-a-half decades between 1894 and 1914, however, witnessed unprecedented fluctuations in weather conditions, as Table 1 illustrates. Indeed, there were only five years of normal rainfall between 1901 and 1916. During four successive years preceding the plague epidemics—1894–1897—there was either excessive precipitation, or very deficient rainfall. These fluctuations, which could well have been compounded by unusually skewed rainfall distribution during the year as well, possibly assisted the important *dramatis personae*, namely the plague bacillus, the rat flea and the affected rodent population, to multiply unnaturally and set the stage for the devastating human epidemics that followed.

The rainfall data in Table 1, obtained from the meteorological department, Pune, contains annual readings for half-a-century (beginning 1871), for Gaya District, and for the years 1900–1920 for Shahabad district. These observations can be taken to constitute a 'normal distribution', which arises wherever a number of random factors act independently upon a central tendency. One of the chief features of a normal distribution is that about 68 per cent of the observations are within 1 Standard Deviation from the Mean, while about 95 per cent of the observations fall within 1.96 Standard Deviation from the Mean. The data in Table 1 conforms to this pattern.

Three out of the four readings beyond 1.96 Standard Deviation occur during 1901–1914, which covers only a quarter of the entire period. Forty per cent of all readings beyond 1 Standard Deviation from the Mean also fall during this period. It is not possible to make a similar analysis for Shahabad, as annual rainfall figures prior to 1900 are not available. The Shahabad data nevertheless constitutes a natural distribution, and the Standard Deviation method can therefore be used to identify years of abnormal rainfall. It will be clear that rainfall figures collected from two places not very far from each other (Gaya in Gaya district and Dehri in Shahabad district) indicate that only seven years during the first two decades of the twentieth century can be said to have had normal rainfall. What Table 1 does not reveal, however, is the extremely unfavourable distribution of rainfall in the first decade of the twentieth century, except in 1902 (Shahabad) and 1910. Every year of the first decade of the twentieth century witnessed excessive rains and floods, and/or long periods of drought in the crucial months of October to December,²⁴ just as

²² *Census of 1921*, Vol 7, pp 36–39, *Census of 1931*, Vol 7, p 37.

²³ Alexander, *Bubonic Plague*, p 102

²⁴ *Bengal Revenue Administration Reports*, 1900–1901 to 1911–1912.

Table 1
Annual Rainfall 1871-1920 (Inches per annum)

Yr	Gaya			Shahabad		
	Rain	DM	DEV	Rain	DM	DEV
1871	48.73	3.40		31.1	-10.21*	
1872	32.13	-13.20*		43	1.68	
1873	35.57	-9.76		35.3	-6.07	
1874	45.9	0.57		46.7	5.36	
1875	38.25	-7.08		42.6	1.21	
1876	45.9	0.57		34.6	-6.71	
1877	44.28	-1.05		44.7	3.39	
1878	44.36	-0.97		22.4	-19.00**	
1879	44.51	-0.82		40.9	-0.45	
1880	45.98	0.65		52.2	10.80*	
1881	48.92	3.59		44.9	3.54	
1882	45.58	0.25		31.6	-9.73	
1883	46.48	1.15		62.4	21.09**	
1884	23.96	-21.37**		29.8	-11.58*	
1885	52.45	7.21		37.7	-3.66	
1886	67.39	22.06*		46.8	5.41	
1887	44.14	-1.19		49.6	8.22	
1888	53.11	7.78		44.8	3.47	
1889	44.5	-0.83		55.1	13.76*	
1890	61.37	16.04*		30.8	-10.54*	
1891	36.93	-8.40				
1892	42.21	-3.12				
1893	47.05	1.72				
1894	63.46	18.13*				
1895	32.01	-13.32*				
1896	28.83	-16.50*				
1897	58.34	13.01*				
1898	45.59	0.26				
1899	54.86	9.53				
1900	37.19	-8.14				
1901	44.22	-1.11				
1902	39.87	-5.46				
1903	35.27	-10.06*				
1904	60.22	14.89*				
1905	41.69	-3.64				
1906	48.19	2.86				
1907	59.64	14.31*				
1908	23.15	-22.18**				
1909	61.91	16.58*				
1910	51.68	6.35				
1911	53.38	8.05				
1912	24.03	-21.30**				
1913	74.52	29.19**				
1914	40.31	-5.02				
1915	37.53	-7.80				
1916	57.21	11.88*				
1917	53.46	8.13				
1918	52.17	6.84				
1919	58.58	13.25*				
1920	54.55	9.22				
Mean			46.63			41.3
STD			11.18			9.78

Source: Indian Meteorological Department, Pune

Note: DM: Deviation from the Mean
STD: Standard Deviation

* over 1 Std. Dev.

** over 1.96 Std. Dev.

the infections resurfaced after the mandatory summer break. Such unusual weather made evacuation all the more difficult.²⁵ It was against this backdrop of capricious weather conditions that plague epidemics spread in these districts.

Bubonic plague can spread only as fast as the prevalent means of transport, since in normal circumstances neither rats nor fleas can venture widely on their own to cause more than sporadic local outbreaks. Rats move slowly, sometimes taking as long as six weeks to cover 100 yards. A rat-borne epidemic has therefore been described as a 'creeping epizootic'. The infection typically moves slowly and deliberately, house by house, street by street, devastating some areas, barely touching others, and bypassing still others, as the infection moves from one rat community to another and then, as the rats die, transferring itself to humans living in these areas.²⁶

In medieval outbreaks, bubonic plague typically arrived by ship, and crept slowly to the interior. While the plague may have been a 'creeping epizootic' in the ancient and medieval world, it spread rapidly from Calcutta to upcountry regions in early twentieth century India on account of the extensive railway network, which transported grain along with its complement of infected rats.²⁷ However, it may have also travelled along other major trade routes such as roads and waterways. The East India Railway (EIR) traversed the thickly populated portion of northern Shahabad, while the grand chord line of the EIR wove its way through the heart of both the districts. The plague established itself in areas of urban concentration contiguous to the EIR, such as Gaya and Arrah towns, in the cold weather of 1900.²⁸ The epidemic then crept along the areas adjoining the railway line, never wandering very far from it, in the classic fashion of the creeping epizootic. Contemporary administrators likened the spread of plague to a fire eating its way along a hillside, making more headway here and there, and at times leaving places untouched amidst the general conflagration, pursuing its course of destruction until the hot winds came and dried the disease.²⁹

Gaya and Arrah were the only towns in the two districts with a population exceeding 25,000.³⁰ It is, therefore, not surprising that they were the first to be hit,

²⁵ *Bengal Municipal Proceedings*, 'A' Series, Nos 7-8, October 1905

²⁶ Appleby, 'The Disappearance of the Plague', p. 164, Alexander, *Bubonic Plague*, pp. 6-7.

²⁷ *Bengal Municipal Proceedings*, 'A' Series, Nos 3-4, June 1904, Jennings, *A Manual of Plague*, pp. 42, 44. The heavy mortality of trading classes lends credibility to the view that grain was the medium through which plague was transmitted to the local rodent population, amongst whom it spread as an epizootic before being transmitted to humans. *Census of India, 1911*, Vol. 5, Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Sikkim, by L. S. S. O'Malley, Calcutta, 1913, p. 72. It is interesting to draw a parallel with the Moscow plague epidemic of 1771, where plague entered in shipments of wool and silk, cf. Alexander, *Bubonic Plague*, p. 268.

²⁸ *Census of 1901*, Vol. 6, pp. 85-87.

²⁹ *Bihar Municipal Proceedings*, 'A' Series, Nos 1-2, August 1905.

³⁰ Gaya town had a population of 71,288 and Arrah town a population of 46,170 at the time of the 1901 Census. There were four other towns with a population between 10,000 and 25,000 each, viz., Sasaram (23,644), Dumraon (7,236), Buxar (13,945) and Jagdishpur (11,451). All these towns lay along the EIR, and were all plague-affected. Jahanabad town, with a population of 7,018, which lay

since plague typically flourishes in areas of human concentration. It is for this reason that medieval European plague epidemics mainly convulsed great cities like London, while smaller cities and market towns were less affected. Villages and hamlets were relatively safe because they had fewer inhabitants.³¹

As the plague epidemic spread, panic ensued. The Census operations of 1901 were disrupted as villagers abandoned established sites.³² There was a sudden increase by over Rs 100,000 in the payment of land revenue by money order as people were unwilling to go to the headquarters to pay the revenue in person on account of the plague.³³

The Pattern of Plague Epidemics

Seasonal Occurrence

Plague ravaged the two districts from 1900, till it disappeared quite mysteriously after 1923.³⁴ The epidemics almost invariably began after the onset of the rainy season, and fell off as the hot season approached, in contrast to cholera and fever. This was also in contrast to the medieval European pattern where plague remained dormant during the winter months.³⁵ A statistical analysis of the distribution of the incidence of plague in 1902, 1903, 1904 and 1910, for which monthly figures are available, reveals the following: over 90 per cent of the deaths occurred in the five months from December to April, with about one-third of the annual mortality occurring in a single month, viz., March (Table 2).³⁶

This seasonal pattern derived from a fortuitous simultaneous occurrence of at least four attendant circumstances. First, *Yersinia pestis*, the plague bacillus, is more sensitive to the heat of the Indian summer, than to the cold season; it thrives in moderate humidity within a temperature range of 10–27°C. Second, fleas tend to multiply rapidly in temperatures of 20–25°C, and a humidity of 0.03–0.3 per

on the Patna–Gaya railway line, was also very badly affected, particularly in 1911 *Census of 1911*, Vol 5, pp 27, 119, *Census of India*, 1921, Vol 7, Bihar and Orissa, by P C. Tallents, Patna, 1923, pp 38–39; *Census of India*, 1931, Vol 7, Bihar and Orissa, by W C Lacey, Patna, 1933, p. 37, *Bengal Revenue Administration Report*, 1907–08

³¹ Appleby, 'The Disappearance of the Plague', p. 162

³² The flight of villages from affected areas is reminiscent of medieval Europe. There was an exodus from Arrah thana, while over 11,000 persons fled the Tikari thana between the preliminary and final census counts in 1901. The population of Nawadah thana swelled on account of plague refugees. *Census of 1901*, Vol 6, pp 85–87, *Census of 1911*, Vol 5, pp 119–20

³³ *Bengal Revenue Administration Report*, 1900–1901

³⁴ *Census of 1931*, Vol 7, pp 35, 37. This rather sudden disappearance is reminiscent of the European experience, which is the subject of a keen and inconclusive debate. Roberts, 'Flea', Appleby, 'The Disappearance of the Plague'. We can only speculate that since plague is primarily a disease of rodents, there was, for some reason, a decline in epizootics

³⁵ L S S O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers Shahabad*, Calcutta, 1906, p. 45, *Bengal Municipal Proceedings*, 'A' Series, Nos 30–35, April 1903, Russel, *The Fontana Economic History of Europe*, Vol. 1, p. 55

³⁶ Compiled from *Bengal Municipal Proceedings*, 'A' Series, various numbers.

Table 2
Seasonal Distribution of Plague

	1902		1903		1904		1910		Total	Distrib (in %)
	Gaya	Shahbd	Gaya	Shahbd	Gaya	Shahbd	Gaya	Shahbd		
Jan	666	39	0	1,115	634	1,737	37	707	4,935	10%
Feb	1,980	241	5	1,494	1,394	2,759	85	1,189	9,147	18%
Mar	4,808	1,720	290	1,947	3,017	2,770	148	2,349	17,049	34%
Apr	2,849	2,214	383	1,087	815	1,134	38	836	9,356	19%
May	429	246	42	59	65	105	2	64	1,012	2%
Jun	17	8	1	0	7	13	1	10	57	0%
Jul	6	0	0	0	7	13	11	2	39	0%
Aug	1	14	0	0	106	171	28	13	333	1%
Sep	0	135	3	2	90	142	50	101	488	1%
Oct	5	101		88	47	79	0	115	435	1%
Nov	9	164	43	580	130	261	29	516	1,732	3%
Dec	20	199	242	1,224	617	1,300	148	1,274	5,024	10%
Total	10,790	5,081	1,009	7,596	6,929	10,484	542	7,176	49,607	100%

Source: Bihar Municipal Proceedings, Various Proceedings, 'A' Series

cent. (Fleas were most in evidence during the first three months of the year, and large numbers were seen at the time of the mango blossom in February and March.) Third, March is also the breeding period of rats, although there are always sufficient rats available in earlier months to carry on the infection. Fourth, people tend to sleep out in the open more often in summer, whereas cold and wet conditions drive them indoors. This increases the chances of contact with rats in crowded settlements.³⁷

Cyclical Pattern

While plague remained endemic in both the districts for over two decades, severe epidemics were punctuated with years of markedly low mortality. The widespread popular belief that bubonic plague was cyclical was the subject of keen debate in administrative circles. The magistrate of Patna commented that 'the experience of the last five years has led people to the generalisation that the plague is severe in alternate years'.³⁸

The theory of high mortality in alternative years was, however, severely mauled by the figures for 1905–1906 and 1906–1907. Indeed, the aggregate district, or even thana, figures do not reveal any significant cyclical pattern. There were others, however, who argued that the cyclical pattern could not be established on the basis of the district or thana returns, which showed in a stark manner how deceptive

³⁷ Jennings, *A Manual of Plague*, pp 28–30, 45, 53 Russell, *The Fontana Economic History of Europe*, Vol 1, p 55, Alexander, *Bubonic Plague*, p 4, Bengal Municipal Proceedings 'A' Series, Nos 7–8, October 1905; Nos 79–80, September 1907

³⁸ Bengal Municipal Proceedings, 'A' Series, Nos 3–4, June 1904, Nos 21–22, August 1908

and fallacious unmindful aggregations can be. 'The alternative severity in the returns from the plague is marked', wrote Captains Connor and Cooks in their *Report on Plague Work in Bihar during 1907*, 'but to appreciate the point, it is necessary to take separate villages ravaged by plague, and not the aggregate cases of thanas in which there are probably hundreds of villages. For, in a thana, some villages may be very slightly affected, whilst others are severely affected in the same season, so that the aggregate from year to year does not show this periodicity'.³⁹

Plague among humans is perhaps best perceived as a secondary epidemic arising out of several epidemics afflicting commensal rat populations. Each rat community would have a geographical spread no bigger than a village. They would be greatly diminished in the epidemic, as it is only at this stage that the fleas start looking for human hosts, thereby transmitting the epidemic to humans. It would take at least a year or two for the rat population to regenerate before it could be infected again. In the medieval European epidemics it was observed that rats tended to increase in explosive fashion every three to four years.⁴⁰

Spatial Bias

The spatial bias of the plague epidemics was alluded to earlier. The scarcity- and famine-prone southern hilly tracts in the two districts, relatively sparsely populated and far removed from the main communication highways, were hardly touched by plague.⁴¹ On the other hand, urban settlements adjoining the EIR were the worst affected, as plague has a natural affinity with densely populated areas. It was perhaps on account of heavy human concentration in rural areas that, in contrast to medieval Europe, villages were almost as severely affected as towns.⁴² The average population density of the two districts, which were almost wholly rural, was far in excess of that of medieval Europe: 449 persons per square mile (Gaya) and 478 (Shahabad) in 1891, compared to the medieval western Europe average of around 48.3 in 1800. Even this average estimate is on the higher side, since typical pre-modern mortality rates in Europe began declining between 1750–1800,⁴³ something which did not occur in India before 1921.

It so happened that the EIR passed through the most densely populated thanas, especially in Shahabad district: Atari (495), Tikari (650), Arrah (989), Shahpur (785), Buxar (539) and Dumraon (779). It was these thanas which were most affected by plague.

The problem was compounded by the clustered settlement pattern of the villages. It is interesting at this point to compare the spread of bubonic plague in South Bihar

³⁹ *Bengal Municipal Proceedings*, 'A' Series, Nos 79–80, September 1907.

⁴⁰ Russell, *The Fontana Economic History of Europe*, Vol. 1, p. 55; Alexander, *Bubonic Plague*, p. 4.

⁴¹ *Bengal Municipal Proceedings*, 'A' Series, Nos 3–4, June 1904.

⁴² Jennings, *A Manual of Plague*, p. 56.

⁴³ Andre Armengaud, 'Population in Europe, 1700–1914', in Carlo Cipolla, ed., *The Fontana Economic History of Europe*, Vol. 3, *The Industrial Revolution*, Fontana, 1973, pp. 28–38.

and Bengal, where the plague bacillus first reached India in 1895. Major Clemesha of the Indian Medical Service, while pointing out the remarkable immunity of Bengal (outside Calcutta city) to the plague, remarked in 1906:

A house so constructed as not to be suitable for rats to live in, and not containing any food to attract rodents, would probably remain uninfected unless a case of pneumonic plague was placed in it. There is the greatest difference between the Bihar and the purely Bengali villages. In Bihar the mud houses are closely packed together, so as to utilise every inch of ground. There are no streets, narrow passages between the walls only remaining. The village is compact; it may consist of several 'tolas' or hamlets separated by a considerable distance, but each such hamlet is a compact, overcrowded unit. In Bengal, exactly the opposite tendency prevailed. Villages were a cluster of houses not quite contiguous and each house was buried in a thicket of bamboo and thick vegetation, having its own compound and the individual houses are often some distance apart. Undoubtedly, the Bihar village was the ideal type for plague to flourish in. It is certainly infested with rats.⁴⁴

The freedom of rural Bengal from plague was mainly due to the lesser contact rats had with humans compared to other parts of India. It had a more dispersed settlement pattern. The houses were also more airy and were often made of solid masonry. Thus *Mus rattus*, the species of rat that carried the plague in this part of the world, was comparatively rare in Bengal houses. Experiments also showed that the plague bacillus retained its vitality for a very considerable period in cow-dung, the material composing the floors of most houses in rural Bihar.⁴⁵ There was, of course, a constant influx of emigrants to Bengal from infected areas to seek employment in the fields, or on the railways, or in the mills and factories. The peculiar etiology of the disease, however, made its transmission from person-to-person contact quite rare.

Class Selective

Epidemics in traditional agricultural societies, untouched by modern public health measures, are putatively class selective. Crisis death followed scarcity and famine

⁴⁴ *Census of 1911*, Vol 5, p 73. The 'ranyat's' house was also his grainstore, which was naturally infested with rats. For this reason the trading classes were heavily hit, as they generally lived in dark, rat-infested store godowns. *Census of 1921*, Vol 6, p 72. It is interesting to compare the high grain-trader mortality with clergy deaths in medieval Europe. The clergy comprised Celibates who normally lived alone or with a companion or two, in contrast to other families, usually two adults and differing numbers of children. Normally one rat family had the run of a house, so it was likely that the priest would get infected. Cf. Russel, *The Fontana Economic History of Europe*, Vol 1, p 55. A grain trader's rat-infested godown, on the other hand, could support more rat families on account of the plentiful supply of food, thereby increasing the risk of infection.

⁴⁵ Jennings, *A Manual of Plague*, pp 28-29.

with clockwork regularity, and the poor were more susceptible both on account of their poor nutritional status and their being priced out of the food market. Social deprivation, dysfunctional behaviour, vagrancy and migration, all of which are associated with subsistence crises, also diffused infection. Amartya Sen has observed that even famines typically kill not so much by starvation, but by magnifying the forces of death normally prevalent in the pre-famine period.⁴⁶

Several, perhaps most, pre-modern diseases, particularly those that were stomach related, such as cholera, gastroenteritis and fevers of various sorts, were lower class-selective and scarcity related. The case of plague—or at least the manner in which it spread in south Bihar—is a little peculiar in that it had something of an upper class, and upper caste, bias. The unusually high incidence of trader mortality was alluded to earlier. *Halwai* shops and *dhabas*, similarly, rarely escaped, since *Mus rattus* had a marked preference for sweets and cooked food such as chappatis. Banias and Brahmins, moreover, were very loathe to associate with any rat-killing operations, because it was considered sacrilegious to kill an animal that pulled Lord Ganesh's chariot. The Vaishnavs were pure vegetarians, and were opposed to killing animals of any kind. The rat-trappers, moreover, were almost invariably the low caste Musahars, whose entry into the house was considered polluting. Major Clemesha observed that villages dominated by the 'better class of natives—Rajputs and Babhans'—were more susceptible, as their houses were practically inaccessible to plague medical staff as their women were 'strictly pardanashin'.⁴⁷

The efficacy of the plague medical staff in containing plague is arguable. However, there are other reasons to suspect that plague was upper class-selective. It was well known that evacuation markedly reduced plague mortality. The poor mostly camped in the open, in temporary mat huts. The more well-to-do, on the other hand, frequently fled to other houses, and therefore continued to be susceptible.⁴⁸ There were also complaints of gang robberies in empty houses, and the well-to-do therefore kept returning to their houses to protect their property, especially since the epidemic was at its peak during the storage period of the valuable opium crop.⁴⁹

To a substantial extent, therefore, the spread of plague in south Bihar underscores the importance of disease as an independent variable in determining pre-modern mortality rates.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ John D. Post, 'The Mortality Crises of the Early 1770s and European Demographic Trends', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 21, Summer 1990, pp. 42–46; Amartya Sen, 'Famine Mortality: A Study of the Bengal Famine of 1943', in E.J. Hobsbawm et al., eds, *Peasants in History*, Delhi, 1980, pp. 202–5.

⁴⁷ *Bengal Municipal Proceedings*, 'A' Series, No. 23, October 1900; Nos 79–80, September 1907, Nos 86–89, February 1909.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Nos 1–2, August 1905.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Nos 7–8, October 1905, Nos 88–89, August 1905.

⁵⁰ Wrigley and Schofield have underscored this independent status of disease in an influential work. Anthony E. Wrigley and S. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541–1871*, Cambridge, Mass., 1981, pp. 354–55, 452.

Gender and Age Bias

The last persons to be evacuated from plague affected areas were women, children and the aged. It is therefore not surprising that these groups suffered most from the plague.³¹ Dressing the dead, handling the clothes of the deceased, and simply staying more at home, exposed the female sex to greater risk when the blocked flea sought a fresh host. According to official estimates, 57 per cent of those who died on account of plague in Bihar were females.³² In Shahabad, 62 per cent of all 'official' plague deaths were those of females.³³ To view these figures in their true perspective, it must be borne in mind that official figures had a long history of understanding female deaths. 'The habits of women', remarked P.C. Tallents, author of the 1921 Census of Bihar and Orissa, 'expose them much more to the attacks of the rat flea than do those of the men, they live less in the open air, they go barefooted, they sweep the floors and handle the grain, they nurse the sick and assemble round the corpses for the purposes of mourning just at the time when there is the greatest risk of infection. Wherever . . . there is plague there is likely to be heavy female mortality.'³⁴

It is intriguing that the reversal in the sex ratio in the districts, which was traditionally in favour of females, coincided with the plague epidemics, as can be seen from Table 3.

Table 3
Sex Ratio

	<i>Gaya</i>		<i>Females per 1,000 males</i> <i>Shahabad</i>	
	<i>Actual</i>	<i>Natural</i>	<i>Actual</i>	<i>Natural</i>
1872	1043		1064	
1881	1036	1026	1068	1023
1891	1043	1026	1082	1126
1901	1037	1009	1096	1054
1911	1035	992	1062	1010
1921	1003	964	1029	976
1931	1001		995	

Source: Census of India, 1881, 1931.

Note: Natural population is the actual population corrected for migration.

This fall in the proportion of females is a little puzzling, because both the districts had a net outflow of population right up to 1931, and emigration always had a male bias. Table 6 (p. 440) reveals that the fall applied equally to the natural population as well as to the actual population, although emigration helped maintain an illusory surplus in the latter.

³¹ *Bengal Municipal Proceedings*, 'A' Series, Nos 7-8, October 1905, *Census of 1911*, Vol. 5, pp. 37, 268; Jennings, *A Manual of Plague*, p. 48.

³² *Census of 1931*, Vol. 7, p. 168, *Bengal Municipal Proceedings*, 'A' Series, Nos 6-7, June 1911.

³³ *Bengal Municipal Proceedings*, 'A' Series, Nos 6-7, June 1911.

³⁴ *Census of 1921*, Vol. 7, p. 168.

One way of testing the hypothesis that the sex bias of plague mortality lay behind the decline in the proportion of females in the population is by comparing the decline in the seven affected thanas with the district averages. Between 1891 and 1911, the proportion of females in the actual population declined by 0.6 per cent in Gaya district, and by 1.8 per cent in Shahabad district. The decline in the affected thanas of Gaya was as follows: Tikari 2.2 per cent, Gaya town 7.1 per cent, Gaya Mufassal 1.2 per cent, and Atari 0.9 per cent. In the Shahabad thanas, Arrah and Dumraon showed spectacular declines of 4.8 per cent and 5.4 per cent respectively.

It could plausibly be argued that elevated female mortality during the plague epidemics explains the fall in the proportion of females after 1891 in the above five thanas. However, Buxar and Shahpur, while showing significant declines of 1.1 per cent and 0.7 per cent respectively, do not validate the hypothesis. Moreover, the continued fall after 1921 remains a demographic enigma, although this could possibly be explained by the decline in emigration in the 1920s.⁵⁵ Since sex ratio figures are complicated by migration trends; one has to be very cautious in drawing definitive inferences regarding the impact of plague on the sex ratio, especially since the decline extended to non-plague-affected districts as well. What could perhaps be said with some degree of confidence is that the decline in these plague-affected districts predated the decline elsewhere in the province, reducing them from having the highest to having the lowest proportion of females in the province.⁵⁶

Plague Mortality

According to the official figures, plague claimed 68,000 lives in Shahabad between 1901 and 1910, and 50,314 lives in Gaya district (except 1901 and 1909, for which no figures are available) during the same period (Table 4).⁵⁷ We have consequently made some projections for these two years for Gaya, so as to make the mortality in Gaya commensurate with that in Shahabad. We could, perhaps, round off the figures to about 125,000 during the first decade for both the districts taken together. The official toll in Shahabad district during the next decade was around 13,000 each in 1911, 1914 and 1918,⁵⁸ and 9,000 in 1921–24.⁵⁹ We could perhaps round off the figure to 50,000 for the entire period from 1911–1924. Figures for Gaya district for this period are not available, but we could perhaps take a conservative estimate at, say, 60 per cent of the Shahabad figure, or 30,000. Thus, we get a total mortality figure of 205,000 for the two districts during the entire period 1901–1924.

⁵⁵ *Census of 1931*, Vol. 7, pp. 35–38.

⁵⁶ *Census of 1921*, Vol. 7, p. 167

⁵⁷ *Bengal Municipal Proceedings*, 'A' Series, Various Proceedings; *Census of 1921*, Vol. 7, pp. 119–20

⁵⁸ J.F.W. James, *Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteers Shahabad*, p. 60, *Census of 1921*, Vol. 7, p. 38.

⁵⁹ *Census of 1931*, Vol. 7, p. 37

It was admitted in official circles that the mortality returns generally made by the police were 'extremely primitive'. Since child, and especially female mortality, was heavy in plague epidemics it is almost certain that under-reporting of plague deaths was even higher than usual.⁶⁰ It is also almost certain that a large number of plague deaths were returned as 'fever deaths', the pet diagnosis of the village chaukidar.⁶¹ It is pertinent to note that there was a large incidence of the septicaemic form of plague in the area, which was difficult to distinguish from the ordinary malarial fever, as it killed the patient before the diagnostic buboes got a chance to develop.⁶² The number of deaths ascribed to 'fever' suddenly jumped by 11,000 in 1901, and fell by 22,500 the next year in Gaya district, a most suspicious variation, especially since the rise and fall replicated the plague cycle.⁶³ Major Clemesha reported several varieties of plague during the Barh epidemic in 1900, including 'a particularly interesting variety, as it was not infrequently mistaken for cholera', where the bacillus attacked the gastrointestinal tract. In one particular case, the railway doctor actually diagnosed cholera as the cause of death, but this was followed swiftly by two (undoubtedly) plague cases in the same house.⁶⁴ Keeping these factors in mind, we could perhaps escalate the mortality figure by about 20 per cent—although even an escalation of 40–50 per cent could be defended—which brings us to a figure approaching one quarter of a million.

Plague mortality was concentrated in a few thanas and towns adjoining the EIR. Therefore, the census figures could perhaps be used as a check on the above estimate. Tables 5 and 6 based on census figures, give us some indication of this great scourge in the severely affected thanas and towns. The census enumeration of both 1901 and 1911 are, however, a little deceptive, as both these counts were done at a time when plague was raging. The accuracy of these counts is therefore arguable. There was general panic, and people were also temporarily fleeing from established sites. The huge losses of 10 per cent and 20 per cent respectively in the Arrah and Tikari thanas in 1901 relative to 1891, and the concurrent unnatural increase of 15 per cent in the Nawadah thana are largely attributable to this flight.

⁶⁰ *Bengal Municipal Proceedings*, 'A' Series, Nos 79–80, September 1907. J.A. Bourdillon surmised that there was a deficiency between 15 and 20 per cent in the registration of female deaths. There was a similar under-reporting of infant deaths relative to adult males. *Census of India, 1881*, Vol. 6, Bengal, by J.A. Bourdillon, Calcutta, 1883 p. 65. According to Kingsley Davis, the under-registration of deaths in British India definitely exceeded 30 per cent at all times, and was probably nearer 50 per cent, Kingsley Davis, *The Population of India and Pakistan*, Princeton, 1951, p. 34.

⁶¹ *Bengal Municipal Proceedings*, 'A' Series, Nos 1–3, November 1901.

⁶² *Ibid.*, Nos 1–2, November 1904.

⁶³ This led O'Malley to infer that plague mortality in Gaya district was around 26,000 during the first eight months of 1902, as against 10,790 officially reported for the full year. L.S.S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Gaya*, Calcutta, 1906, p. 97. L.S.S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Shahabad*, p. 44.

⁶⁴ *Bengal Municipal Proceedings*, 'A' Series, No. 23, October 1900. Such diarrhoeic symptoms were a marked feature in many plague cases in Gaya district as well. *Ibid.*, Nos 79–80, September 1907.

Table 4
Plague Mortality: 1901-1910

	<i>Gaya</i>	<i>Shahabad</i>	<i>Total</i>
1901	4,836	2,418	7,254 (Guess)
1902	10,790	5,081	15,871
1903	1,009	7,596	8,605
1904	6,929	10,484	17,413
1905	18,209	16,222	34,431
1906	4,757	5,927	10,684
1907	7,645	10,067	17,712
1908	433	2,024	2,457
1909	217	1,005	1,222 (Guess)
1910	542	7,176	7,718
Total	55,367	68,000	123,367

Source: Same as Table 2.

Note: Plague mortality in Gaya in 1901 has been taken at 200 per cent of the Shahabad figure, i.e., in roughly the same ratio as in 1902. Similarly, the mortality in Gaya in 1909 is taken at 20 per cent of the Shahabad figure, roughly the same ratio as prevailed in 1908.

The huge losses registered in the towns of Jehanabad and Gaya, and possibly Arrah, in 1911, are similarly explained, since a major portion of this loss was made good in 1921.

The 1901 census, moreover, also reflects the large fever mortality in the northern thanas of Gaya, and especially Shahabad. These thanas were in fact on a demographic downswing right from 1881. The 1921 count, on the other hand, is complicated by the influenza pandemic, which claimed lives in every thana in the two districts.⁶⁵ When we consider the (raw) population differentials between 1891 and 1921 in the plague-affected thanas, about half the decline is during 1891-1901. Even when we make allowance for the high fever mortality, such a massive decline appears unlikely, and would seem to reflect the operational difficulties involved in conducting a census count just as the plague scare was spreading fast and mortality had begun to mount. It is, consequently, practically impossible to deduce directly the plague mortality from the raw census data without making some corrections.

What has been done in Table 5 is that the total population of the two districts has been calculated, excluding the plague affected thanas (Districts, Table 5). The population's growth rate for the period 1891-1921 (GR 1891-1921) has been worked out, which has then been applied to the plague-affected thanas. We thus arrive at a hypothetical population for the plague-affected thanas in the year 1921 (Cor. Total). The difference between this hypothetical figure and the actual census count is the 'Corrected' figure, which would appear to be the population missing on account of the plague in these seven thanas.

The raw census figures in Table 5 show that between 1891 and 1921 Atari lost 26 per cent of its population, Tikari 5 per cent, and Gaya town and Mufassal taken

⁶⁵ Alok Sheel, 'Long-term Demographic Trends in South Bihar: Gaya and Shahabad Districts, 1811-1921', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 29(3), July-September 1992, pp. 323-48.

Table 5
Total Population loss in affected Thanas

<i>Thana</i>	<i>1881</i>	<i>1891</i>	<i>1901</i>	<i>1911</i>	<i>1921</i>
Gaya Town	75,150	78,908	69,890	48,848	66,132
Gaya Rural	202,206	179,963	167,831	192,096	184,007
Atari	96,750	123,840	105,458	93,848	91,913
Tikari	176,875	183,950	148,575	166,263	155,650
Arrah	312,582	350,092	315,708	275,072	275,072
Shahpur	195,804	197,762	187,972	162,517	152,727
Buxar	163,152	166,415	156,626	148,468	130,522
Dumraon	259,903	270,299	259,903	233,913	220,918
Total	1,482,422	1,551,229	1,411,962	1,321,024	1,276,940
Cor Total					1,576,891
Districts	2,607,981	2,654,362	2,592,872	2,693,214	2,698,274
GR 1891-1921	0 02				
1921-1891 (raw)	-274,288				
% Loss	-18%				
Corrected	-299,951				
% Loss	-19%				

Source: Census of India, 1891, 1901, 1911, 1921

together, 3 per cent. The mortality in Shahabad was much higher: Arrah lost 21 per cent, Shahpur 23 per cent, Buxar 22 per cent and Dumraon 18 per cent. These figures, however, include mortality on account of 'fever' and influenza. The 'Corrected' total indicates a population loss of 19 per cent on account of the plague up to 1921. This figure excludes the mortality on account of fever and influenza. These would have affected the non-plague affected thanas as well. When this percentage is computed into numbers, the result is consistent with the earlier estimate that showed that plague claimed about one quarter of a million victims in Gaya and Shahabad districts between 1901 and 1924. If anything, the number is nearer 300,000, as the mortality on account of the paring burst in Shahabad district is not included in this calculation. If this is included, the population loss in the affected thanas would go up by 20 per cent. It may be noted that the estimate derived from the census counts does not take into account plague mortality outside the seven affected thanas.

Plague mortality in the affected thanas, boggling though it may appear, and after provision is made for large-scale under-reporting of deaths, was nowhere near the 'Black Death' level in England in which 20 per cent of the population is said to have perished in just two years, between 1348-1350.⁶⁶ In the seven severely affected thanas the loss of 20 per cent was spread over two decades.

Plague is estimated to have claimed 68,407 lives in London in 1665, 39,200 in Marseilles in 1720, and 56,672 lives in Moscow in 1771.⁶⁷ The south Bihar figures

⁶⁶ Russel, *The Fontana Economic History of Europe*, Vol 1, p 55.

⁶⁷ Alexander, *Bubonic Plague*, p 303

appear to be modest in comparison: 15,800 deaths were recorded in the whole of Shahabad district in the first six months of 1905, when the plague epidemic was at its peak, and 10,000 in Gaya in the first three months of the same year. Although most of these deaths were confined to a few thanas, there were no horrifying urban disasters of the medieval Europe type simply because there were no comparable urban centres like London, Marseilles or Moscow. Unlike Europe, however, rural morbidity, and hence mortality, was high as plague fanned out to clustered village settlements over a large area in densely populated thanas adjoining the EIR.

The two districts did not have any big urban centre, apart from Gaya, and no trend towards urbanisation is discernible. There was nevertheless a modest increase in the urban population till 1891 when the plague caused a rather dramatic de-urbanisation, both by way of mortality and flight. Towns such as Nawadah, Aurangabad and Bhabhua, which were largely unaffected by plague, maintained their slow and sporadic growth (Table 6).

In medieval Britain, where the etiology of the disease was unknown, as soon as an epidemic broke out in earnest, those that could afford to do so, left the stricken town or village. The well-to-do certainly took flight from London. However, quarantine measures were often enforced, and the residents of affected villages were prevented from leaving their houses for fear of spreading the plague to other areas, frequently with disastrous consequences.⁶⁴ While quarantine measures were also adopted in Shahabad and Gaya, these were such as to segregate infected persons, and those who had been in contact with them.⁶⁵ Indeed, large-scale flight was officially encouraged from affected areas and undoubtedly helped reduce the toll, stupendous though it nevertheless was.

Several measures were tried by the administration in their desperate bid to contain the plague epidemic, without much success, however.⁶⁶ Disinfection did not target the rats or the fleas, the main carriers of the disease. The coverage of plague hospitals and inoculations was very low, and their efficacy was never conclusively established, as a number of persons died despite the inoculations, and in the hospitals. Sixty-eight out of the 129 persons treated by the 'Plague doctor' in Shahabad died in the winter of 1902-1903. Figures from Bankipore Jail, where detailed records of each and every prisoner were kept, showed that while two-thirds of non-inoculated prisoners who contracted the plague during the epidemic died, 20 per cent of those who had been inoculated also perished.⁶⁷

Rat killing did provide perceptible relief where it was resorted to on a large-scale, but this was attempted only in Jagdishpur town, and that too for a brief period. Since rats are very prolific, and their populations recover very fast, this method was found to be very expensive, and was soon discontinued. A total of 1.5

⁶⁴ Roberts, 'Plague', p. 33.

⁶⁵ *Bengal Municipal Proceedings*, 'A' Series, No. 89, March 1899; Nos 49-50, April 1899.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, Nos 7-8, October 1905; Nos 68-69, September 1907.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, Nos 1-2, July 1902, Nos 34-35, April 1903.

Table 6
Urban Population Trends, 1881-1931

	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921	1931
Gaya	76,415	80,383	71,288	49,921	67,562	88,005
	1 00	1 05	0 93	0 65	0 88	1 15
Arrah	42,998	46,905	46,170	38,549	40,769	48,922
	1 00	1 09	1 07	0 90	0 95	1 14
Sasaram	21,818	22,713	23,644	23,097	22,308	24,221
	1 00	1 04	1 08	1 06	1 02	1 11
Dumraon	17,429	18,384	17,236	15,042	14,132	14,421
	1 00	1 05	0 99	0 86	0 81	0 83
Buxar	16,498	15,506	13,945	11,301	10,098	13,499
	1 00	0 94	0 85	0 68	0 61	0 82
Daudnagar	9,870	9,851	9,744	9,149	8,511	11,699
	1 00	1 00	0 99	0 93	0 86	1 19
Jagdishpur	12,568	12,475	11,451	8,924	8,564	9,661
	1 00	0 99	0 91	0 71	0 68	0 77
Jehanabad	5,286		7,018	4,764	6,956	8,764
	1 00		1 33	0 90	1 32	1 66
Nawadah			5,908	6,828	9,533	7,485
			1 00	1 16	1 61	1 27
Aurangabad			4,685	5,799	4,833	7,428
			1 00	1 24	1 03	1 59
Bhabhua	5,728	10,216	5,660	5,452	5,435	6,002
	1 00	1 78	0 99	0 95	0 95	1 05
Tikari	12,187	11,532	6,437	5,861	4,827	5,481
	1 00	0 95	0 53	0 48	0 40	0 45
Gaya District	100	99	96	101	101	112
Shahabad District	100	107	100	95	93	102

Source: Census of India, 1881-1931

million rats were killed at a cost of Rs. 23,787 over two years in Jagdishpur.⁷² The attempts in other places were half-hearted: 125,504 rats killed in Gaya municipality over three years, 12,220 rats killed in Tikari municipality, and 113 rats killed by the police (sic) in Daudnagar municipality in 1907.⁷³

Rat poison was distributed at some places, but this did not prove to be popular. Apart from the general opposition to killing of rats on religious grounds, widespread rat mortality, whatever the cause, was popularly linked to the onset of the plague. Since the arrival of 'officials' was triggered by rising death rates, officials were frequently blamed for triggering the epidemic as well. The fact that there were virulent plague epidemics while the census operations were being conducted both in 1901 and 1911 also fostered distrust and fear of officials. Much of the rat-killing operations was consequently done by professionals—mainly Musahars—who indiscriminately targeted the innocuous brown field rat (*Mus decumanus*), in

⁷² *Ibid.*, Nos 79-80, September 1907

⁷³ *Ibid.*, Nos 86-87, February 1909

addition to *Mus rattus*, so as to maximise their earnings. Since there was no popular participation, once the reward—a very modest one pice per rat—was withdrawn, rat killing ceased altogether, and within a year the plague resurfaced in Jagdishpur with renewed virulence, after a gap of three years.⁷⁴

In the absence of the total breakdown of communication between the administration and the people, the onset of plague was the signal for spontaneous flight. The flight in fact began as soon as rats were observed to be dying in large numbers. As it turned out, this simple rule of the thumb was the only reliable preventive,⁷⁵ and helped reduce plague mortality, especially where it was comprehensive and timely.

Concluding Remarks

Plague spread in the districts of Gaya and Shahabad with a bang in the first winter of the twentieth century. The plague bacilli probably entered Calcutta by ship from the Far East, as part of the third great plague pandemic, from where they were rapidly transported to upcountry regions via the railway network.

Whatever the source of infection, plague is primarily a disease of rodents which only incidentally affects humans. Fortuitous factors facilitated both its rapid spread and demise in the region, such as unusual meteorological conditions, the fact that the EIR traversed very densely populated revenue thanas, and the clustered settlement pattern. Unlike medieval Europe, therefore, plague spread rapidly and affected villages almost as badly as it did urban areas.

Apart from its spatial bias, the epidemic also had a seasonal, cyclical, social, gender and age bias. Unlike medieval Europe, the plague was most active in the cold weather and practically dormant in the hot and rainy months. The bias towards merchant morbidity parallels the bias towards clergy morbidity in medieval Europe. Women and children suffered more simply because they stayed more at home.

Although nowhere near the 'Black Death' level of 1348–1350, official mortality figures were nevertheless gross underestimates. Total plague mortality in the seven severely affected thanas was possibly in the range of one quarter of a million in the period 1900–1924. The affected thanas lost some 20 per cent of their population over two decades.

For the western world, bubonic plague is a horrible disease tucked away in the Middle Ages. This collective historical memory is in sharp contrast to the popular ignorance that prevails regarding the etiology of the disease and the modes of transmission, reflected in the panic-stricken quarantine measures invoked against a suspected recrudescence of the disease in India a few years ago. It was forgotten that plague is a disease of rats, and not of humans, who cannot transmit the disease, and that quarantine can only increase mortality, as it did in the Middle Ages in Europe. The fact remains, however, that in several parts of the developing world,

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, Nos 57 and 62, June 1909.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, Nos 3–4, June 1904; Nos 1–2, August 1905.

poverty and squalor set in dense human habitats and against a backdrop of rapid global environment change, continue to expose human populations to this medieval disease, as the recrudescence of the plague in western India recently revealed. Rodents are prolific creatures, and the plague therefore continues to be enzootic among rat populations. Fortuitous events can still spark epizootics, and consequently human epidemics, much the same way as these occurred in the medieval world. Indeed, modern means of transport can ensure that such epidemics would spread far more rapidly than the creeping medieval epizootics. It is probably public health measures, including the resolution of the complex etiology of the disease and the availability of effective drugs, which seems to be keeping the disease at bay. Despite the global scare the Surat phenomenon created, plague was stopped in its tracks, and the dreaded medieval scourge failed to recur.

Book Reviews

HENRIETTE BUGGE, *Mission and Tamil Society. Social and Religious Change in South India (1840–1900)*, Surrey, Curzon Press, 1994, in collaboration with Nordisk-Institut for Asienstudier (Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), Copenhagen, Monograph Series # 65, pp. xrv + 223, Price not mentioned.

This is an important and detailed contribution to Mission studies. The area is South Arcot district and the period 1840–1900. The preface provides a history of land use, divine kingship, and Muslim rule before moving to colonial administration. The book has a general description of Christian missionary activity, beginning with the work of St. Thomas, the Apostle, as the myths describe it, and then moves on to the Portuguese and the Jesuits. De Nobili is given some attention since the tension of his engagement with Christian belief and Indian culture are still being debated. The Protestant missions are analysed with reference to the country of their origin: Danish, German, English.

On native priests and catechists and the interactions implicit in this relationship, I feel that Dennis Hudson's unpublished thesis on this subject is still the last word, Henriette Bugge's chapter would have appeared more nuanced if she had read Hudson's text, which Susan Bayly also refers to as a very important work. What the author of this monograph is good with is the empirical classification of information about catechists, the bases of recruitment, of customs and manners. This tells us a great deal about caste, class and race as it operates within the grid of native and colonialist.

The most interesting chapter of all (chapter 5) deals with sin, penance, and control. It also describes how complex the dialogue between Hinduism and Christianity is, and this is the actual subtext of the monograph. In chapter 6 Bugge discusses the relationship between material production and conversion necessary for our understanding of Christianity as a lived experience, of ethics and codes, and the manner in which material goods (modernisation, education, famine relief) become agencies of the mission process. Since this is an entirely polemical area, Bugge's social-scientific discipline and discretion is commendable.

The author is able to take a small geographical area and highlight very concisely broad theoretical and empirical debates. The pity is that some of the tedium she

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self-admittedly (p. 190) feels for her material percolates into her own text. It is a collation of facts and events, but somewhere the 'story' is missing. Further, I personally do not accept the cleavage between administrators and colonialists which many writers like Bugge accept, and find that in spite of the East India Company's vacillations (for business reasons), administration and mission—particularly after 1858—coincide

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PARTHA CHATTERJEE, *A Possible India. Essays in Political Criticism*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 301, Rs. 495.

PARTHA CHATTERJEE, *The Present History of West Bengal: Essays in Political Criticism*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 223, Rs. 375.

These two volumes are a compilation of Partha Chatterjee's essays written over a period of two decades. Originally planned as a single volume to be called *Possible Nations*, it was split thematically into two at the suggestion of the publisher mainly for reasons of length. All the essays on Bengal have now been grouped conveniently within the covers of one book. The more general ones on India are collected in another handy companion volume. The volumes together contain a medley of academic essays, lectures, straightforward political commentary and book reviews, and can loosely be said to concern themselves with the field of politics. Chatterjee's successful forays into history, for instance, are not represented here—presumably they will be collected in another volume.

A large part of both the volumes reprints shorter pieces on contemporary political events originally written for *Frontier, Economic and Political Weekly* and various Bengali journals. The latter have been translated and are available for the first time in English. Arranged chronologically, they roughly cover the period from the late 1970s to the early 1990s. The vast range includes commentaries on the regimes of Indira Gandhi, Charan Singh and Rajiv Gandhi, as well as a passionate defence of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. The decision to reprint these pieces alongside the longer and more dispassionate political analyses is clearly an invitation to compare long-term hypotheses with short-term evaluations. Some of these essays (for instance, 'Indian Democracy and Bourgeois Reaction', published before Emergency was declared in 1975) now seem to have been unusually prescient about future political developments.

The more academic essays, reviews and lectures cover a wide range of subjects. The volume of Bengal tries to problematise the development of politics in the state, which, as the author maintains, has been largely marginal to all-India developments since the 1920s. A large part of this, Chatterjee shows, hinged on the hegemony of the Bengali middle class. There are, therefore, important re-evaluations

of the 'renaissance', the supposed absence of caste in Bengali politics and the Naxalbari legacy. Two complementary essays on agrarian transformation and the second Partition help in putting *bhadralok* politics in context. In the same evaluative vein, the companion volume reprints the famous book review of S. Gopal's *Nehru*, which on its original publication had almost forced *The Indian Historical Review* to close shop since the then Chairman of the Indian Council of Historical Research had deemed (on specious grounds) that criticism of the first Prime Minister of independent India was unacceptable.

In the preface to one of these volumes, Chatterjee has written that his larger concern has been 'with democratic politics—where democracy is not, as the republican cliché still proclaims, government of the people, but *the politics of the governed*' [emphasis in the original]. He adds [in the second preface] that 'there is no single historically stable position . . . from which I can tackle a subject matter that is both irreducibly historical and irreducibly contemporary'. Certainly, there is a noticeable change in Chatterjee's writings post-1992 [i.e., after the destruction of the Babri Masjid] and is represented by essays like 'Secularism and Toleration' and 'Our Modernity'. The latter can be taken as the key essay which illustrates best Chatterjee's theoretical and historiographical shift, since it has been reproduced with slight variations in both the volumes. In this essay, Chatterjee argues that Indian modernity, forged as it was during the era of colonialism, has always been sceptical of the tall claims of Western modernity. Keenly aware of its abject position, the discourse of modernity in India has been marked by an escape from the present to the past. The refusal to acquiesce to modernities established by others may indeed be one of the strengths of 'our' modernity. In the essay on secularism, Chatterjee shows the inability of cultural diversities to articulate themselves in the unitary rationalism of the language of rights. But the Foucauldian solution that he offers to religious minorities to 'resist homogenization from the outside, and push for democratization inside' although remarkably courageous is for that reason bound to prove controversial.

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DAVID LUDDEN, ed., *Making India Hindu: Religion, Community and the Politics of Democracy in India*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1996. xii + 346 pp, Rs. 495.

The book under review comprises 12 out of 29 papers that were discussed at a seminar on communalism in South Asia at the University of Pennsylvania during the academic year 1993–94. The editor has provided titles of all the papers, and it is obvious that the focus of the seminar was primarily on Hindu communalism. (How a paper on Madhva's philosophy came to be discussed under this rubric is

rather intriguing!) The book contains only one article (by Mushirul Hasan) on Muslim communalism, although there are stray references to the phenomenon in a few others.

The seminar was obviously conducted under the long shadow of the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya on 6 December 1992 by gangs of Hindu fanatics. Their vandalism was widely and rightly condemned. For the supporters of the demolition, the event symbolised the effort to restore Hindu honour; for its critics, it raised Hindu-Muslim conflict to a high pitch and represented the majoritarian dream of 'making India Hindu'. David Ludden goes further when he writes that 'Ayodhya . . . conjures the nightmare of nuclear war between India and Pakistan' (p. 2). This obviously is an exaggeration. Five years have passed since the demolition and the resultant large-scale and widespread violence in the immediately following months, but the country has enjoyed a remarkable period of communal peace since the summer of 1993; the challenge of both Hindu and Muslim extremist elements appears to have been contained.

There are other observations in the editor's introduction (and in some other essays) that also seem exaggerated to me. According to Ludden, Peter Manuel's paper on Hindustani music in the book '*explodes* the idea that there was *ever* a deep, traditional division between Hindu and Muslim cultures' (p. 21, emphasis added). Manuel's essay (pp. 119-39) is more guarded and looks upon syncretism in the field of music as a dynamic process that has had its ups and downs; thus, he mentions 're-Hinduization' in the wake of the national movement (p. 125). Does Ludden really believe that the differences between the dances and musics associated with the temple at Jagannath Puri and the shrine at Ajmer Sharif respectively are interchangeable or have no larger significance except as local events? Similarly, his emphasis on the rootedness of Indian Islam oversimplifies a complex situation. Contrary to what he asserts (p. 5), the ties of Indian Islam with Islam as a universal religion are historically, institutionally and emotionally much deeper than those of East Asian Buddhism(s) with India.

There are many good papers in the volume. These are, I suggest, best read as individual contributions. I prefer the 'trees' of this book to its 'wood'. Limitations of space preclude all of them being listed, but I would like to acknowledge the benefit of reading, besides the contribution of Peter Manuel, those of Amrita Basu (pp. 55-80), who carefully explores the reasons for the rise of Hindu nationalism, Mushirul Hasan (pp. 185-208), which is a thoughtful discussion of the making of the Muslim predicament, and Sumit Sarkar (pp. 270-93), who broadens the basis of the discussion of an allegedly homogeneous Hindutva by drawing attention to the dimension of caste conflict.

In view of my own reliance upon literature in some of my work, I found Tanika Sarkar's discussion of the gradual narrowing of the scope of Bankim Chandra Chatterji's novels (pp. 162-84), from a broad concern with social issues to an obsession with Hindu nationalism, of much interest. The essay on writing about communal violence by Peter van der Veer (pp. 250-69) is highly suggestive. He stresses, for example, desirability of re-examining the basic issue of the relations

between the aggressor and the victim, and the public and the state, in the context of violence, as a 'total' social phenomenon, without being 'discursively cut up' into 'real' (economic and political) and 'unreal' (religious) elements.

The paper by Richard Davis (pp. 27–54) on the iconography of Rama's chariot, which follows Ludden's introduction, is also interesting (symbols and images receive much attention in this book). But I do not understand how he can doubt that 'the Babri Masjid celebrates a conquest' (p. 36), for it did so by the proclamation of its builder. I agree with Davis, however, that 'the most effective critique of Sangh Hinduism must come from within the Hindu community' (p. 54). This is one of the most sensible conclusions of the book. I should add here that the other contributors are Victoria Farmer (mass media), Richard Fox (communalism and modernity), Zoya Hasan (communal mobilisation in UP), and William Pinch (soldier monks and militant sadhus).

Finally, a comment on the jacket photograph, which shows a ritual pot, votive clay, oil lamps, etc., placed in the branches of a big *pipal* tree (indicative of a Hindu death ritual?). Does it subtly extend the meaning of the title of the book to include a retreat into folk religion that awaits the secularised?

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SHAIL MAYARAM, *Resisting Regimes: Myth, Memory and the Shaping of a Muslim Identity*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 298, Rs. 475.

'Identity' does not happen to be a static and rigid structure as its context cannot demand purity or originality. Consciousness continually creates it, and interestingly, is itself also created by it. This 'consciousness' is not merely defined by experiences of the present, but contains echoes of the past too. In fact, the past is received by societies in two ways, viz., 'history' and 'memory'. All history is reconstruction and all tradition more so.¹ On the other hand, as a conscious recollection of communities, memory provides the creative input to the identity formation of communities and this identity formation determines its social, cultural and political behaviour to a large extent.²

'Memory' has attracted a lot of research by both philosophers and scientists. Memory in Plato has an a priori ontological status, interpreted through the word 'reminiscence', 'recollection' being an attribute of the soul. Within the framework of Aristotelian metaphysics (which had an exalted influence in Locke, Leibniz and Bergson), reminiscence is imaginative memory which lies in sense perception. Memory is brought down from the ontological to the psychological plane and put in an epistemological framework which begins with sense perception and goes

¹ S.C. Dube, *Ethnicity: Myth, History and Politics*, Shimla, 1983.

² Michael Novak, *The Rise of Unmeltable Ethnicity*, 1972

through the successive phases of imagination, recollection, association and manifestation.

The psychology of memory was translated into the sociology of memory by the Critical School, led especially by Herbert Marcuse. Whereas Freud concentrated on individual psyche, Marcuse concentrated on social psyche. Here memory was not considered as only the 'personal' world; it was considered to be a domain of social investigation as well. Research on memory's relationship with History became a leading field of investigation in the 1980s. The initial studies stayed close to theoretical issues. Maurice Halbwachs' work on collective memory paved the way for historians and anthropologists to study the role of memory in the construction of national identity. Other historians like Le Goff, Furet and Pierre Nora enriched the study of memory in its social and historical contexts.

The present book explores memory as a domain of social and historical investigation following the Halbwachian path. It seeks to study the reshaping of Meo identity in a changing world defined by kingly nationalism, ritual sovereignty, pan-Indian and global movements, contests between Hindu and Muslim organisations and genocidal violence. Meos are the largest ethnic group residing in the Mewat area, located within the triangle of Delhi, Agra and Jaipur. Mewat is a cultural region rather than an administrative unit. This book explores the problem (and dilemma) of categorising the Meos as either Hindus or Muslims (although nineteenth century census reports categorise them as Muslim) because their beliefs and practices drew upon both religions. Mayaram's ethnographic narrative emphasises how the Meos are located between Hinduism and Islam, thereby challenging the theoretical terrain based on the binary categories of 'Hindus' and 'Muslims', and suggests instead an alternative conception of 'liminal identity'. This liminal identity is meant for 'intermediary location'. The concept is propounded by von Gennep, and developed by Victor Turner who used it as a shorthand for the 'intermediary', whether in the form of bridges, gates, doorways, bodies or social margins.

The term 'liminality' is therefore preferable, suggesting a potentially anti-structural questioning of categorical identities—in this case 'Hindu' and 'Muslim'. But while the theory of liminal identity may be true for Mewatis and some other communities, it is not helpful in depicting the dynamics of ethnic divides in India in its totality. As is known, many identities coexist within the narrative structure of 'identity' and 'community'. One community may reflect a 'liminal' location in society in terms of its cultural identity, but whenever the religious or political identity gets dominant, its liminal position transforms into a more rude, rigid and categorical location.

This book explores the processes of state formation and construction of ethnic identity through the mythic world narrated in the Meo oral tradition. Myth as the primary form of organisation of collective memory enables the group to preserve a remembered past, conserve community integrity and identity and propose a vision of the future. Meo myths are contesting and resisting myths. It counters the statist enunciation of Truth and History and denial of identity; it shows how princely regimes and the *Tablighi Jama'at* have been perceived and responded to and resisted by the subject group. The Mewati poetic mythical tradition suggests an

alternative construction of the past and an inversion of established classificatory categories.

The oral tradition in this book can be divided in two parts—Mirasi (performed and sung by professional bards), Dhamukar and others, and Meo-authored oral cultural texts. Dhamukar belongs to a genre of *bat*, but its author, Chota Mev, as one of the participants of the Meo movement, provides us with an insider's account. The renarrativisation of the oral tradition interrogates the spatial and temporal constructions of the historiographical reactions of the Meo movement, which maintains that the movement began at Govindgarh in December 1932. Further, what the narrative makes explicit is that it is a predominantly Meo movement, neither a Muslim nor a communal one, for it involves the participation of Hindus in the movement. The narrative details individual agency, on which the archival record is largely silent. The book also presents the case of contesting history in an Indian society. The state version of History and nature of Meo movement is contested by the history which resides in the oral traditions of the Meo community.

While discussing oral tradition and the representation of the subaltern world, in the introduction of the book, the author has made certain oversimplifications. She suggests that 'cultural performances are traditionally a male domain, women being excluded from both authorship and audience. The voice of the group as represented in its oral tradition is exclusively male'. In my view, this is an oversimplification of the inner world of oral traditions and overlooks its complexities. As we know, most of our oral tradition and folk culture, e.g., Jantsar (folk lore of grindmills), folk arts, women folk parodies, etc., are creative traditions of women. One may find many spaces in our oral traditions which reflect the representation of protest of women, by women.

This book has eight chapters dealing with nationalism, identity, ethnic violence, partition, etc., centred around Meos. It is the ethnohistory of a community based on written as well as oral records. The book is the interpretation of numerous collected 'episodic' and 'fragmented' local narratives of the community to counter the terrain of master narratives about the Meo community. Metanarratives which seem to suppress and assimilate 'local', 'other' and 'contesting' narratives. In my view, this is the way to be free from a 'Hegelian hubris' and create new forms for narrating post-colonial ethnohistories of communities.

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ANTHONY GORDON O'BRIEN, *The Ancient Chronology of Thar: The Bhattika, Laukika and Sindh Eras*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 211 + 16 plates and 2 maps, Rs. 450.

The aim of the book is to discuss the origins and development of the ancient systems of calendrical reckoning prevalent in the Thar region. The sources used

are some 500 stone inscriptions (most of them unpublished) which the author located and copied in the course of several field trips in Jaisalmer district. Most of these epigraphs are inscribed on free-standing pillars, some on plaques set into buildings. Their purposes is commemorative, to record events such as the foundation of a tank or a temple, or the death of an individual of the locality. The language is Sanskrit, or Sanskrit with a vernacular influence. The data which forms the basis of O'Brien's analysis are 260 dates in the Bhāṭṭika era and its predecessor that appears in the inscriptions.

The book introduces the reader to the Maharāvālas of Jaisalmer, Rajput princes of the Bhāṭṭi clan. Tradition speaks of the presence of the Bhāṭṭis in Lodrava (about 16 km north-west of Jaisalmer town) from the tenth century, but the earliest epigraphic reference to their activities in the Lodrava-Jaisalmer area occurs in an inscription of 1125–26 A.D. O'Brien explains concisely and clearly the various aspects of the Indian lunisolar calendrical system (the synodic month, *tithis*, *nakṣatras*, etc.) and their application in the inscriptions of the Jaisalmer area. As for the eras, O'Brien points to the increasing use of the Vikrama and Śaka eras in the Jaisalmer area from the second-half of the fourteenth century, which is rather late compared to the popularity of these eras in other parts of India from a much earlier period. With a few exceptions, between 1125 and 1351 A.D., inscriptions in this part of Rajasthan are dated in an era peculiar to this region—the Bhāṭṭika Saṁvat, the first year of which corresponded with 624–25 A.D.

O'Brien briefly discusses the history of the Bhāṭṭika era and, on the basis of a close analysis of the details provided in the epigraphs, proceeds to explicate its various elements and aspects. He goes on to discuss the relationship between the Bhāṭṭika Saṁvat of Jaisalmer and certain other eras—the Laukika era of Kashmir, the Sindh era, and the Harṣa era.

The third chapter of the book focuses on the historical significance of the Bhāṭṭika era. The author delves into early medieval texts such as the seventh century Persian chronicle, the *Chachnāma*, for references to the presence of the Bhāṭṭikas in the Sindh region. There is a lengthy discussion of the problems of the origins of the Bhāṭṭikas and the question of identifying the place named Bātia/Bhāṭiya mentioned in the *Chachnāma* and also in Al-Bīrūnī's account. While the author states that no specific event of political or military significance can be connected with the epochal year of the Bhāṭṭika era, he suggests that the general significance of this period is that by the middle of the seventh century, the Bhāṭṭikas were a power to be reckoned with in the middle Sindh area. Several centuries later, around the beginning of the eleventh century, the Bhāṭṭikas gradually moved eastwards into the Thar region, and established themselves as a ruling dynasty in the Jaisalmer area by 1124 A.D. The fourth chapter of the book identifies the possible astronomical significance of the Bhāṭṭika era, particularly through its connection with the Saptarṣi cycle. Further details and data pertaining to the calculation and verification of dates are contained in an Appendix, as also in a series of lists and tables attached to the text. The book also includes two maps which help the reader to identify the various places and locales of inscriptions mentioned by the author. 16 colour plates add visual appeal.

As the title of the book and the summary of its contents given above indicate, this is a highly technical work. A reader who is uninitiated into the intricacies of ancient Indian calendrical systems will no doubt find herein some material of general interest, but it is the specialist scholar who will be able to fully appreciate its contents. As a work that uses epigraphic evidence as a basis of an analysis of the calendrical systems prevalent in a particular part of the subcontinent, this book form an significant contribution to an important area of historical scholarship.

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CHRISTOPHER SHACKLE and JAVED MAJEED, *Hali's Musaddas: The Flow and Ebb of Islam*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1997, 262 pp, Rs. 395.

Altaf Husain Hali (1837–1914) was born in a *sharif*—i.e., not belonging to any artisan community—but poor family in Panipat. Married early, he ran away to Delhi because he keenly desired to educate himself, and though he had to return home after only 18 months, he never lost that desire. He returned to Delhi some years after the Mutiny and found employment as a tutor in the household of Nawab Mustafa Khan Shefta. Shefta was a highly learned man and a prominent figure in Delhi. Through him, Hali came to know Ghalib, and also Syed Ahmad Khan. After Shefta's death, Hali moved to Lahore, where he found employment in the Punjab Government Book Depot. His work as an editor of instructional books brought him significant exposure to Western educational and literary ideas. Eventually he returned to Delhi, to teach for 12 years at the Anglo-Arabic College. In 1887, he retired to Panipat after being granted, at Syed Ahmad Khan's behest, a modest pension by the Nizam, where he continued to write both verse and prose. Among Hali's major works in prose are two biographies (of Ghalib and Sir Syed) and a book on poetry and poetics;¹ likewise, there are several outstanding poems too, but the *Musaddas* is his towering achievement.

The book at hand presents Hali's epic poem primarily for the benefit of those who cannot read it in the original, but there is also much in it that may be read with benefit by any Urdu scholar. The book's centre piece is the poem in its revised version, facing an English translation in simple prose.² The changes from the original

¹ Much of Hali's book on Ghalib's life is included in translation in Ralph Russell and K. Islam, *Ghalib: Life and Letters*, London, 1969; an independent complete translation is K. H. Qadiri, *Yadgar-e-Ghalib*, Delhi, 1990. *Hayat-i-Javid*, Hali's biography of Syed Ahmad Khan, has been translated by K. H. Qadiri and David Matthews (Delhi, 1979); for Hali's ideas on poetry and their profound influence on Urdu poetry, see Frances W. Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and Its Critics*, Berkeley, 1994.

² There are two other English translations of the *Musaddas*. An anonymous version titled *Musaddas-e-Hali* was published in 1975 (?) by Peermahomed Ebrahim Trust, Karachi. This is in

version, however, have been noted and commented on in an appendix. Though the supplemental verses that Hali composed for the second edition have been left out, they are sufficiently discussed in the introduction. Hali's own two prefaces, however, are reproduced and translated. The translators' introduction gives a history of the poem and its reception, including much on Hali's imitators and detractors; it then identifies and comments upon the poem's major themes. A bibliography, and a useful glossary and index at the end round off the book. Like the earlier titles in the 'SOAS South Asian Texts' series, this too is a finely organised book. It is also attractively produced, except for a few blemishes: some errors in the transliteration of Urdu verses in the introductory sections (pages 42, 53, 54, 59, 66, 68), misarranged translated verses on page 127, and the loss of a couple of letters in the reproduction of the Urdu text on page 154. The translation throughout is accurate and lucid, making the poem totally accessible. I noted only one serious error. The fifth and sixth lines in stanza 234 presently read: 'The theories of the Greeks are implanted in our hearts, but we do not believe in the revelation presently granted us'. They should be, 'The theories of the Greeks are so deeply engraved on our hearts that we wouldn't accept the Revelation itself were it to happen now'.

The heart of the editors' contribution is the insightful section which carefully identifies and names the poem's major themes: 'Decline and Progress'; 'Smelting and Historical Refashioning'; 'The Economics of Time and Bodily Illness'; 'Deserts and Gardens'; 'Globalization, the Written Word and Literary Propriety'; 'Carriage Progress'; 'Chaos and Order'. The writing is earnest, but thankfully not overloaded with jargon, and only infrequently do they read back into the poem literary fashions of today. The detailed explorations of the extended metaphors of 'garden', 'smelting', and 'illness' in Hali's poems are particularly illuminating. With reference to the first, for example, they not only point out the obvious imaginary—pre-Islamic Arabia a desert, post-Islamic Arabia a garden—but also the less obvious: gardens in the promised paradise; Mughal gardens; and, colonial irrigation projects, such as in the Punjab.¹ Then, they usefully add, '... the weaving together of desert and garden in the poem evokes in part the imaginary landscape of Arabia and the symbolic geography of Persian gardens. Both can be seen to represent the two major strands of Islam, namely the now increasingly central strand of Arab Islam, and the soon to be marginalized Persianate heritage of Mughal India' (p. 61). They, however, begin to lose me when they transform what to me is an idiomatic expression, into something portentous. The lines in question read: *Na kuch aise saman the van muyassar/Karval jis se khul ja'en dil ke sarasar*, 'Nor were there obtainable there [in pre-Islamic Arabia] the requisite materials necessary

straightforward prose, with a detailed introduction and copious notes by the translator. The other is A. Rauf Luther, *Truth Unveiled*, Lahore, 1978, regrettably, it is in verse and utterly unreadable. Neither translation was available to Shackle and Majeed.

¹ They could have also mentioned the tremendous impact on the people of Delhi when the canal that coursed through Chandni Chowk was cleaned up by the English and again flowed with water, reviving a sense of security and prosperity.

for the lotus-flowers of the heart to open fully' (p. 62). The authors' comment: 'This image of a lotus flower blooming in the desert makes abundantly clear the poet's identification between cultivation—both material and spiritual—and civilization generally'. And this, they feel, proves their earlier statement that the poem 'seems to value . . . the cultivation of exotica in hitherto inhospitable environments'. Their use of the word 'exotica' then leads them on the one hand to juxtapose it with Hali's use of the English word 'natural' in his new poetics, and on the other, to what they call 'the exoticization of Islam' in late nineteenth century. To my mind, that is placing an overly heavy exegetical burden on an ordinary idiomatic expression for 'heart's desires', which Hali could have as easily used it in any other context.

Likewise, in the sub-section entitled, 'Globalization, the Written Word and Literary Propriety', the authors', remark that 'the *Musaddas* is acutely aware of what imperial power can command in archival terms' is precisely right, and they correctly identify how Hali links 'travel' with 'knowledge' and laments the lack in his co-religionists of "scientific" habits of observation and verification'. They do not, however, acknowledge the possibility that Hali's source of inspiration could also have been the numerous occasions in the Qur'an where God commands mankind to observe and reflect upon the Universe, and the hadith that enjoins Muslims to seek knowledge even if it is to be found in far away China.

Next, they state: 'Hali assumes . . . throughout the poem, a homogenous all-Indian Muslim identity. To a certain extent, this conception reflects the way the category was defined in the Population Census of India from 1871 onwards The poem does not just assume the existence of an all-Indian Muslim community, bound together by a common historical experience of decline. The shift toward Arab strands of Islam, and the move away from Persian influences, signals an attempt to link the existence of an all-Indian Muslim community with a pan-Islamic one, whose centre of historical gravity is to be found in the Middle East (pp. 66–67).' For one, Hali's posited 'centre of gravity' was Mecca, not the Middle East or the Ottoman Caliphate, which was the case with the 'Pan-Islamists' who came after him. Further, Hali's homogenous Muslim community was posited against the actuality of a community that viewed itself in sectarian terms and, more significantly, as consisting of *ashraf* and *ajlaf*—upper caste/class people and lower caste/class people. It is this latter 'egalitarian' spirit that distinguishes Hali from many of his peers. But there is an obverse side too.

An intriguing line in the *Musaddas*, not commented upon by Shackle and Majeed, describes the Muslim 'fleet' coming to grief on the shores of the Ganges.⁴ Hali does not offer any explanation why the disaster occurred. But in another poem written nine years later—*Shikva-i Hind* ('Complaint to India')—Hali, while acknowledging India's 'hospitality', charges it with the destruction of all that was

⁴ Stanza 113: 'That fearless fleet of the religion of the Hijaz, whose mark reached the extreme limits of the world, which no apprehension could obstruct, which did not hesitate in the Gulf of Oman, or falter in the Red Sea, which traversed the seven seas—sank when it came to the mouth of the Ganges' (p. 145)

noble and good in the immigrating/conquering Muslims. After coming to India, complains Hali, the Muslims became ungenerous, socially and racially discriminating, non-egalitarian, and much worse, the implied but unnamed cause being the caste divisions and rules of untouchability within the 'host' Hindus. The poem ends making a somewhat peculiar identification between the two 'outsiders', the Muslims and the British, while radically separating them from the indigenous people, presumably the Hindus.⁵ Here, Hali's definition of 'his people' is primarily exclusive and not so liberal.

Hali, however, was not blind to the everyday tyrannies of the colonial rulers. This comes out sharply in a poem entitled 'The Medical Examination of a White Man and a Black Man'. An Indian, on horse back, and an Englishman, on foot, go to see the Civil Surgeon, to obtain from him a medical certificate that would allow them to go on leave. On the way they quarrel, and the Englishman severely beats the Indian. When the two finally see the doctor, he immediately certifies the Englishman as being ill, but denies the Indian. 'There must be something seriously wrong with a White whose blows fail to kill a Black', the doctor explains, 'but a Black who doesn't fall down dead when hit by a White couldn't possibly be ill'.⁶

In a section entitled 'Carriage Progress', Shackle and Majeed seek to highlight what they believe to be Hali's ambivalence towards his own iconic notion of Progress [*taraqqi*]. 'First', they begin, 'at one point in the poem progress is likened to the carrion corpse of a female dog (*murdar kuttiya* [sic]). Although the context here is the failure of Muslims to recognise what progress is, to describe progress as 'carrion' is more suggestive of enervating decline than invigorating progress. This is a clear instance in the poem where the value system of the text, apparently so much weighted in favour of progress, becomes blurred (p. 73).' But the correct context is twofold: first, the immediately preceding stanzas which praise Indian Hindus for being 'progressive' and thus pre-eminent in all walks of life; and second, the archly sarcastic tone of the stanza which contains the phrase in question. The pertinent lines are: 'We [the Muslims] still do not have even the slightest idea as to what sort of carrion bitch progress is' (p. 153); [*nahin ab tak aslam khabar ham ko ye bhi ki hai kaun murdar kuttiya taraqqi*]. Here, Hali has used two idiomatic expressions—more precisely, an idiom and a proverb—commonly heard until at least 50 years ago, and both more closely identified with female speech and thus, in terms of Urdu culture, more intensely condemning of the all-male Muslim elites. Hali merged the first expression, *murdar*, with the second, which he abbreviated as well as translated—the original expression being, '... *che kuttisi*'.⁷

⁵ The poem begins: 'Farewell, India, the autumn-less garden We, your foreign guests, have stayed enough' It ends: 'Just as the snake-charmer keeps his distance from the snake, so will all your rulers from you We shall leave behind many blessings of ours, and though we shall be gone, others will be edified by what we experienced' Cf. Iftekhar Ahmad Siddiqui, ed., *Javahir-i-Hali*, Lahore, 1989, pp. 314, 320.

⁶ Siddiqui, *Javahir*, pp. 100–101. Sir Syed also wrote a scathing essay about an actual incident in which an English officer killed his groom.

⁷ I can still recall a female relative's remark concerning someone she regarded as shameless: *vo kya jamen sharm che kuttisi!* 'How would she know shame from a bitch?'

Later in the same sub-section, they find ambiguity in Hali's laudation of European peoples' 'restless energy', and declare that 'the languorous pose of Indian Muslims [painted by Hali] can almost seem positively appealing'. They cannot be faulted for finding languor appealing, but I must point out that Hali is not ambiguous at least in the earlier lines they comment upon: 'They [the Europeans] are racing so fast along the way of searching as if they had still very far to go' (p. 151). The correct reading, as the printed text shows, is *usi tarah* ('in just the same previous manner'), and not *is tarah* ('in the following manner')—only the latter would readily allow their interpretation of *goya* ('as if') as suggestive of something 'illusory' in the Europeans' race for progress.

Hali, however, has a separate poem on Progress, which he presented in December 1903, at Bombay at the 17th annual meeting of the Muslim Educational Conference.⁸ It clearly indicates that whatever ambivalence Hali might have had concerning the notion of progress—I, for one, see hardly any—it could lie only in what he perceived to be its twofold course: progress always came hand in hand with decline—one group's progress inevitably meant decline for another. And that is why, Hali insisted, all members of any group must hold together—they must hold collective benefit above individual gain. Hali, in his own fashion, found that to be true in the case of the latest success story in world history: India's colonial rulers. He could have been ambivalent toward the latter's role in India, but there is only an absolute urgency in his call to his Muslim compatriots to come together and launch themselves headlong down the course of progress just as their contemporary rulers had done.

To conclude, despite the traces of frustration in the immediately preceding remarks, I regard this book as a commendable addition to English language sources on the social and cultural history of the Muslims of South Asia, and congratulate the authors for their exemplary achievement.

C.M. Naim
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⁸ It was later published under two different titles. 'The Philosophy of Progress', and 'Progress and Decline', see Siddiqui, *Jawahir*, pp. 367–71.

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PROVIDENCE AND THE RAJ

Imperial Mission and Missionary Imperialism

Gerald Studdert-Kennedy

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